A Cinematic Artist:
The Films of Man Ray

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I hereby declare that this thesis, "A Cinematic Artist: The Art of Man Ray," is entirely my own, original work and presents research carried out independently.

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ABSTRACT

Man Ray was one of the most innovative and diverse artists of the early twentieth-century. His oeuvre incorporates painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, poetry and film. Yet, his activity in the realms of the moving image remains undervalued and his role as a filmmaker is generally overlooked, despite the fact that his films represent the greatest contribution to the development of French avant-garde cinema of the 1920s. Furthermore, when his films are discussed they are generally restricted to the discourses of Dada and Surrealism, leaving unexplored many vital areas, including how his approach to the cinema relates to early avant-garde film theory, and the exploration of the different ways he creates links between film and the other arts, notably photography.

This thesis examines the four films made by Man Ray during the 1920's – *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), *Emak Bakia* (1926), *L'Etoile de mer* (1928) and *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* (1929) – and assesses them within the context of his wider artistic concerns. It represents one of the first studies to provide an integrated approach to these films, which looks for emerging patterns and similarities from one work to another. Whilst it explores their placement within the Dada and Surrealist movements, it ultimately attempts to take analysis beyond these parameters in order to uncover previously unexplored formal concerns, such as the interaction between movement and light and the tension between abstraction and figuration.

Man Ray's initial intention to put his photographic compositions into movement can be seen as one of the strongest forces in his cinematic work and constitutes the central focus of this study. The central question to be asked is: can Man Ray's cinema be seen in terms of a unified approach that transcends the concerns of both Dada and Surrealism? The main argument to be developed is that there is a creative and visual consistency that can be uncovered from these works that demonstrates an extensive interest in the possibilities of film as an art and which paves the way for future developments in experimental cinema.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Professor Dietrich Scheunemann, who introduced me to the joys of avant-garde film.

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INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the only comprehensive study of Man Ray's cinematic work, Jean-Michel Bouhours draws attention to the relative lack of interest shown towards the artist's films in comparison with the rest of his oeuvre. As he points out, although Man Ray was one of the key figures of the cinematic avant-garde of the early twentieth century, his work with the medium of film remains relatively unknown.[1] Indeed the name 'Man Ray' is not immediately associated with the cinema, but rather with his work in photography, admittedly the domain in which his creative talent was most effectively realised but which nonetheless represents only one area of this multifaceted artist. Beginning his career as a painter, he turned to photography in 1915 with the simple aim of creating reproductions of his paintings for commercial purposes.[2] A fascination with the technological basis of photography and a desire to explore, master and push the boundaries of the medium led Man Ray to become one of the most innovative photographers of the twentieth century.

Yet this interest also led him into the field of cinema and between 1923 and 1929, he made four short experimental films: *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), *Emak Bakia* (1926), *L'Etoile de mer* (1928) and *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* (1929). In addition to this central body of works, Man Ray's oeuvre also comprises a number of films that were made privately, without the intention of ever being publicly screened. Discovered only from 1985 onwards, these films range from home movies to short visual experiments, featuring both friends (Paul Eluard, Picasso, Roland Penrose) and lovers (Lee Miller, Ady, Juliet). Although critics and historians generally acknowledge the existence of these films, the works are seriously undervalued and misrepresented within the broad context of his artistic oeuvre. Apart from a few

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[1] Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas (eds.), *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1997), p. 7.

[2] Man Ray's relationship with photography was complex. Although it was the medium through which he earned a living and gained artistic credibility, he regretted the fact that his painting did not attract equal attention. He particularly resented being labelled a photographer and frequently made pejorative remarks about the medium. His most famous essay, "Photography is Not an Art," published in *View* (number 1, April 1943), outlines some of the major issues related to the medium, arguing, above all, for its inherent artificiality. At other times, he attempted to highlight the artistic merits of photography by placing it on equal terms with painting: "The problem of similarity between painting and photography has never worried me. As far as I am concerned there is no problem, since photography, like drawing or engraving, is part of the art of painting; only the tools differ." Quoted by Arturo Schwarz in *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 228.

essays dealing with individual films, the edited volume by Bouhours and Patrick de Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, remains the only critical work devoted exclusively to his activity in the field of cinema. This seems all the more surprising when we consider that Man Ray's films constitute a large proportion of French avant-garde filmmaking during the 1920s, a period in which a number of visual artists turned to the moving image for the expression of artistically revolutionary ideas. Aside from the significant contribution they made to the development of the experimental film, paving the way for new forms of cinematic expression, Man Ray's films are also intricately linked to his more general artistic approach and demonstrate the formal problems with which he was occupied. This thesis is the first monograph on the cinema of Man Ray, which employs a systematic and unified approach that distinguishes it from the essay collection edited by De Haas and Bouhours. It aims to provide a broad understanding of the development of one film to another, as well as to situate his filmmaking within his work as an artist, tracing links between concerns expressed in different artistic domains. It hopes to offer a significant contribution to the study of this influential figure of twentieth-century art by bringing into the spotlight perhaps the most ambiguous area of his creative output. It is also an exploration of a particular moment in film history, which saw the emergence of avant-garde film activity and the development of a dialogue between film and other art forms.[3]

An interdisciplinary artist

Man Ray's artistic output involved a wide range of media, sometimes mixing different forms of expression within a single work. Like many of his contemporaries, notably Marcel Duchamp, he moved fluidly from one art form to another, choosing the one that would most effectively express a particular idea. This interdisciplinary

[3] For an overview of how Man Ray's films are discussed in the context of avant-garde developments, see: P. Adams Sitney, *The Avant-garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1978); Michael O'Pray, *Avant-garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003); Jacques B. Brunius, *En marge du cinéma français* (Lausanne: Editions L'age d'Homme, 1987); Bernhard Lindemann. *Experimental Film* (Hindesheim: Georg Olms, 1977); Roger Manvell. *Experiment in the Film* (London: Grey Walls, 1949); Standish Lawder. *The Cubist Film* (New York: New York University Press, 1975); Stephen Dwoskin. *Film is ... The International Free Cinema* (London: Owen, 1975); David Curtis. *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution* (London: Studio Vista, 1971). Rudolph Kuenzli's edited volume, *Dada and Surrealist Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), offers an important perspective on the role of film within the movements.

approach has made him a particularly difficult artist to assess, as Neil Baldwin states at the beginning of his biographical study:

> The problem of Man Ray begins with the matter that he cannot be classified as an artist in any one genre. Painter, photographer, filmmaker, printmaker, object-maker, poet, essayist, philosopher – his eclecticism flaunts the grounded rules of art history. Man Ray is a chain of enigmas. Paradoxes characterise each phase of his long and complex career and combine to make him the quintessential modernist personality.[4]

If we use this trans-artistic approach as a starting point, Man Ray no longer poses a problem but instead offers a number of perspectives from which to view his work. This diversity must be embraced rather than overcome if we are to understand and appreciate his very distinctive form of expression. If Man Ray seems to move unpredictably from one mode of expression to another, evading categorisation and constantly reinventing himself, the incorporation of film into his repertoire also demonstrates a progression from the static arts to the art of movement.

In an interview with Pierre Bourgeade, Man Ray highlights his initial resistance to the medium of film, stating, "j'ai résolu de ne jamais m'occuper du cinéma, sauf comme spectateur de temps en temps." [5] Yet, as Patrick de Haas states: "Plusieurs oeuvres plastiques témoignent du fait qu'avant même de toucher une caméra Man Ray était concerné par le cinéma."[6] This can be seen either through direct references to film in other works or in the move towards a specifically kinetic form of expression. Some works, such as *Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph* (1919), produced using the aerograph technique,[7] demonstrate both

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[4] Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (Cambridge, MA.: Da Capo Press: 1988), p. xiii.
[5] Man Ray in Pierre Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray* (Paris: Maeght éditeur, 2002), p. 49.
[6] Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas (eds.), *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1997), p13.
[7] The aerograph technique (or 'airbrush painting'), with which Man Ray experimented during the period 1916-19, is the adaptation of an industrial process for the quick application of paint over large surface using a spray gun connected to a compressed tank. Used in painting, airbrushing gives the picture a smooth perfection and eradicates any sign of the artist's hand, a detail that appealed particularly to Man Ray's unconventional approach to artistic creation. The introduction of a mechanical method of mass production into the "sacred" art of painting represents an important avant-garde gesture, which subverts previously held notions of the relationship between the artist and his craft. It also looks ahead to the practices of reproduction undertaken by Duchamp in later years. Although Duchamp is often seen as the major precursor of Pop Art and Andy Warhol's interest in commercial mass production, Man Ray's extensive use of the aerograph technique can be understood as predating the silkscreen process that became Warhol's trademark. Walter Benjamin, in his seminal

tendencies. As De Haas has observed, at the left-hand side of this painting is a segmented, numbered column bearing a strong physical resemblance to a filmstrip, whilst the abstract combination of disks and lines and the suggestion of three-dimensional space gives the impression of suspended movement, a dynamic feature that will later play a key role in Man Ray's films.[8] An early collage piece entitled *Theatr. Transmutation* (1916) also points to an interest in the medium. It features a sheet of newspaper turned on its side and over which are pasted the almost imperceptible letters 'THEATR'. At the top of the page can be seen the title of the column, 'Cinema Ideas To Have a Chance', pointing precisely to Man Ray's own cinematic ideas that would be expressed some years later. In this work then, the arts of narrative and movement are brought together in a visual collage based on text. As we shall see, Man Ray's films all deal to some extent with the relationship between text and image, with this theme becoming a major concern in the works produced towards the end of the 1920s. These films therefore not only demonstrate the use of cinema (and theatre) as a thematic reference, but they also reflect some of the formal and visual concerns that were incorporated into his explorations into the moving image.

Man Ray was certainly not alone in using the cinema as a visual theme in his work and the above discussion reflects a more general fascination with the medium amongst artists and writers at the beginning of the twentieth-century.[9] Movement itself is a central theme of the artist's output around this period and stretches across a range of disciplines. *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself With Her Shadows* (1916) (**Fig 1.**), another aerograph piece to which I shall return in the following

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essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", discusses the extent to which mechanical intervention transformed the nature of art in the twentieth-century and offers an interesting perspective on the development of the avant-garde from within this context. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1979). The issue of technical and mechanical intervention is crucial to the work of Man Ray. A reversal of conventions and visual qualities can be seen in his use of the rayograph technique in photography, where pictures are produced without the use of a camera and the distanced, mechanical characteristic of the medium is replaced with a more intimate relationship normally associated with painting. The subject of art and technology is a major concern in Man Ray's filmmaking and will be discussed in the course of the following chapters.

[8] See for example the section on 'Suspensions in time and space' in chapter one.

[9] This is especially the case in the field of avant-garde developments. Edward Aitken, in an article on Dada and the cinema, refers to the presence of cinematic references in the works of Dada poets such as Tristan Tzara. "Reflections on Dada and the Cinema," *Postscript: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, vol. 3 no. 2, 1984, p. 5. The Dada leader's interest in the poetic potential of film can be seen in the circumstances surrounding the making of Man Ray's first film, *Le Retour à la raison* in 1923.

chapters, is interesting in the way it incorporates the art of dance in static medium and attempts, through a juxtaposition of vibrant shapes and colours, to suggest dynamism.[10] The photograph *Moving Sculpture* (1920) (**Fig 2.**) features the simple, everyday scene of sheets hanging on a washing line but manages to create compositional complexity purely by capturing the movement made by the wind. Again the title of the piece is significant, since although it overtly refers to the theme of movement, it simultaneously emphasises the limitations of its expression in a static medium. Thus, the photograph asks us to imagine the movement that is present at the particular moment in time, whilst commenting on the *décalage* between the event and its photographic representation.[11] The title is thus an effective interdisciplinary reference since the actual subject of the photograph is neither a sculpture in the traditional sense of the word, nor is it moving. Yet, in its transformation through the photographic freezing of time, it takes on the static, suspended qualities of a sculpture. Elements of sculpture and movement are combined in a number of Man Ray's objects of this period. *Lampshade* (1919) (**Fig 3.**), an unravelled lampshade in the form of a spiral, incorporated the elements of suspension and perpetual movement in the same way as *Obstruction* (1920) (**Fig 4.**), a pyramidal arrangement of coat hangers.[12] Neil Baldwin has also suggested that the rayographs, photographs produced by placing objects directly on or above the photosensitive paper, testify to his interest in and use of movement as an artistic tool. The unique quality of these static works, argues Baldwin, owes much to the movement of objects above the photographic paper coupled with the movement of

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[10] The use of colour to suggest movement was a dominant tendency in early modern art and can be seen in the work of a number of painters, such as Frank Kupka, Robert and Sonia Delaunay. See Frank Popper, *L'art cinétique* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1967).

[11] Roland Barthes effectively theorises the notion of photographic reality in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984). For more discussion on the nature of photographic representation see also Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

[12] For this latter work, Man Ray provided 'do-it-yourself' instructions, enabling anyone to reproduce the same piece of work. This is significant in the way it again draws attention to the process of creation and repudiates the idea of a 'unique' work of art. It brings us back to the idea of art and mass production by using common household items as basic material and a simple, non-artistic, method of construction. However, there is another consideration here, which is the transformation of the banal, utilitarian object through its integration into the world of art, in which it takes on the status of aesthetic object. Links can also be made here with Marcel Duchamp's 'ready-mades' – utilitarian objects that became works of art simply by their selection and isolation as such by the artist. This process clearly influenced Man Ray's own practice in this area.

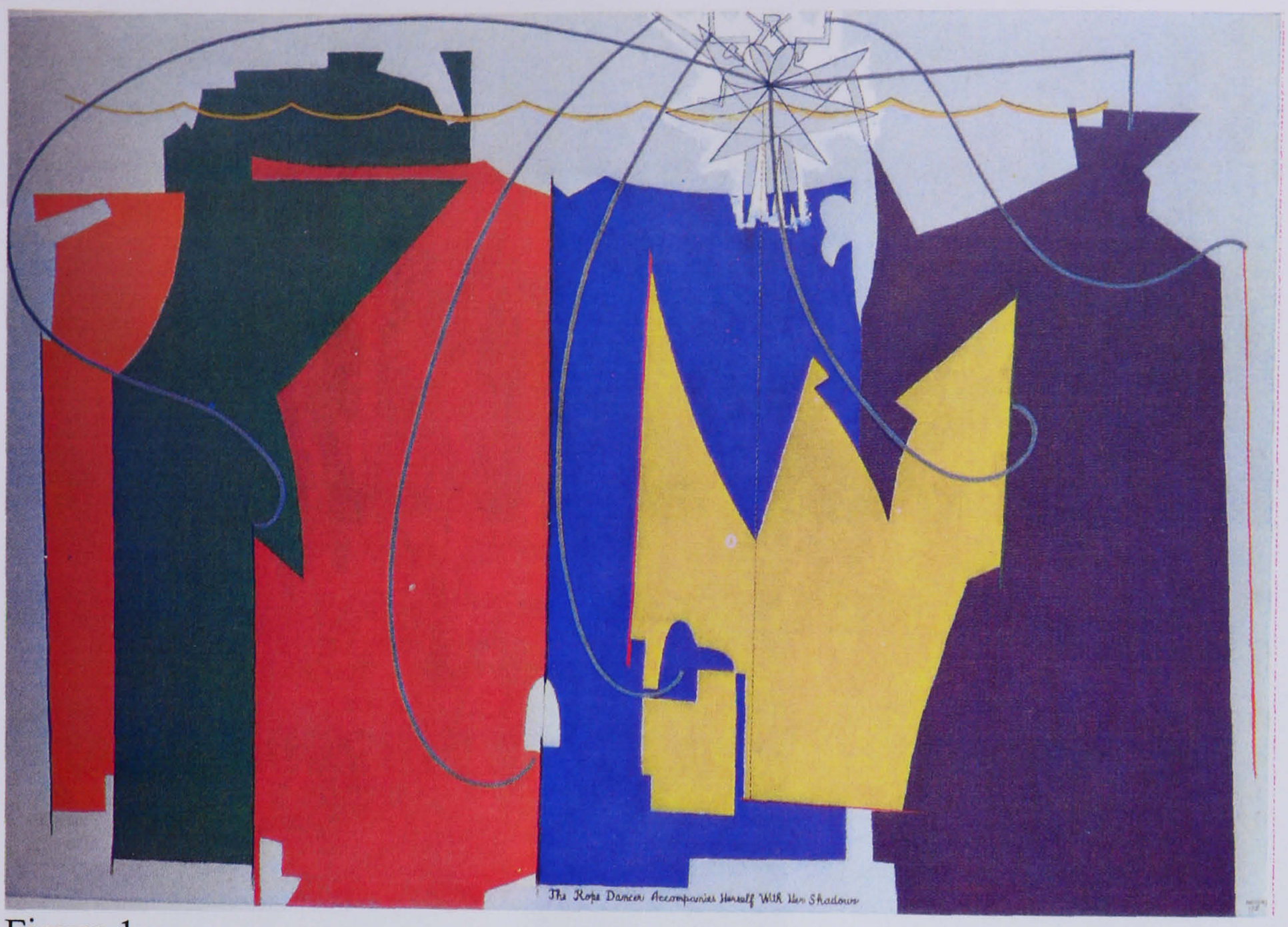

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

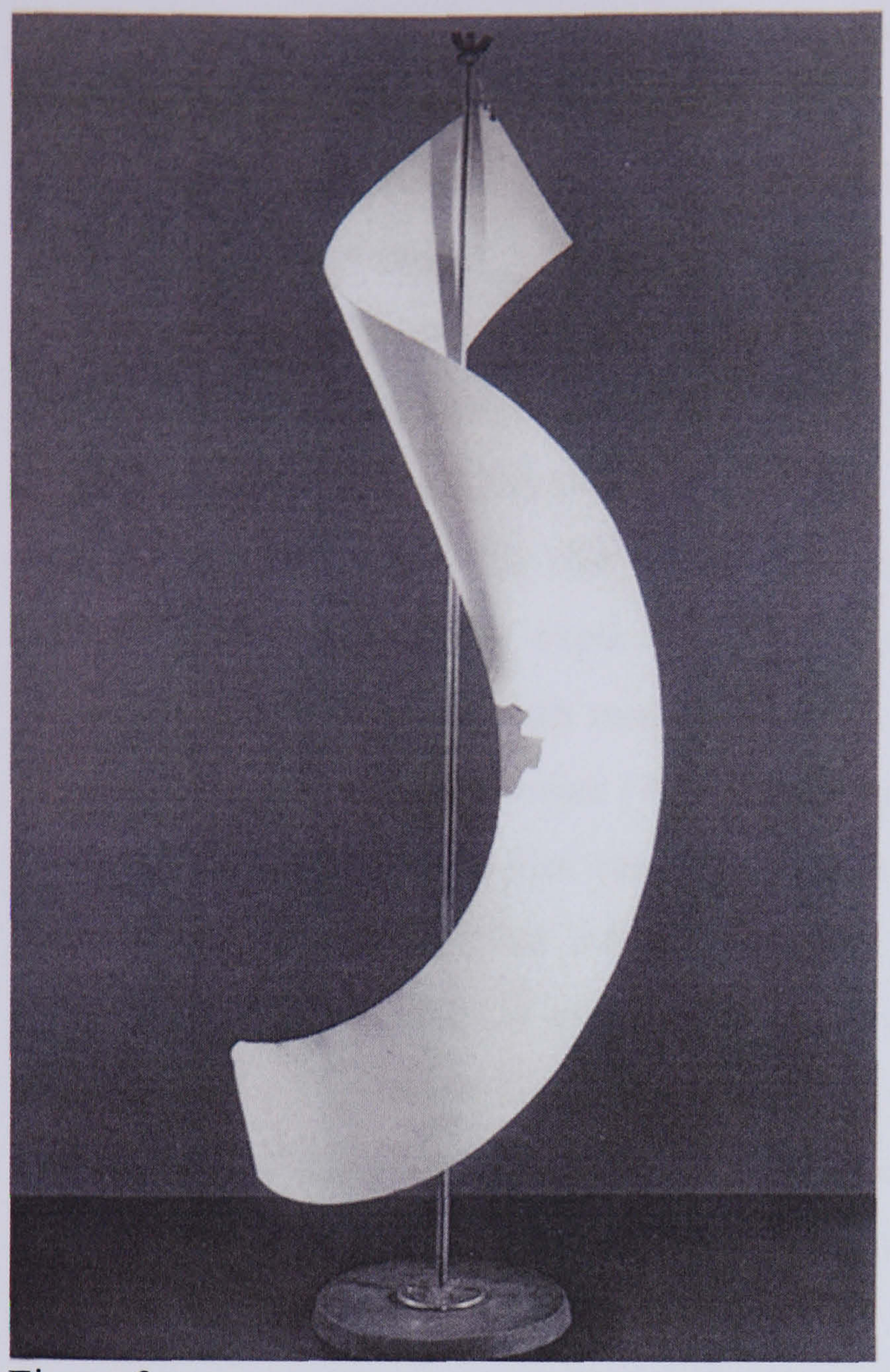

Figure 3.

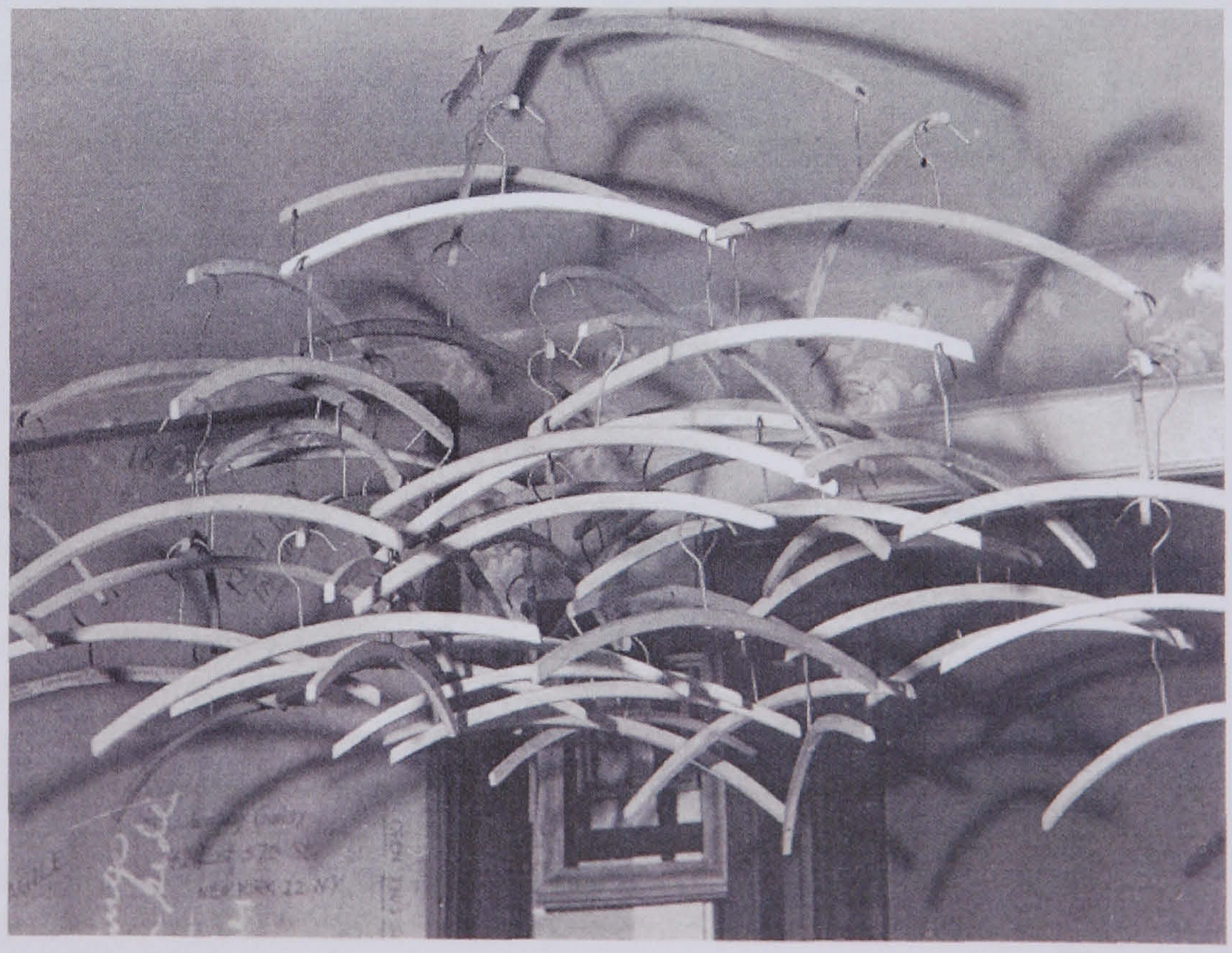

Figure 4.

the light source. This, he notes, has the effect of adding depth and tone to what is essentially a two-dimensional medium.[13]

These observations are crucial in the context of Man Ray's relationship to the cinema since they point to his gradual progression towards the art of the moving image. In his works prior to the experimentation with film, he explores the way movement can be expressed in different domains. Yet he also uses movement as a basis for exploring the limitations of particular art forms and as a way of crossing artistic boundaries. Indeed, one of his first experiences with film was assisting Marcel Duchamp with his explorations into cinematic optics and the creation of depth and perspective through movement. This was to culminate in the making of Duchamp's film *Anémic Cinéma* (1926), on which Man Ray collaborated with Marc Allégret.[14] His interest in film can also be seen in the fact that a number of other films of this period bear his stamp. In René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924), written by Francis Picabia, Man Ray is seen playing chess on a rooftop with Marcel Duchamp. He also had a key influence on *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), a film that is commonly attributed to the painter Fernand Léger and the cameraman Dudley Murphy. The debate around the authorship of this film has entered into cinema history, with each account offering a slightly different version of events.[15] It is therefore difficult to ascertain the extent of each artist's input. Nonetheless, judging by the similarity of some of the images with parts of Man Ray's own films, along with the presence of Kiki de Montparnasse (his lover at the time), it is clear that he was involved for a certain amount of time and that some sections were either created or suggested by him.[16] His own four films greatly extend the parameters of his involvement in the area of avant-garde film. Of these works he has stated:

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[13] Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist*, p. 96.

[14] We can detect an element of circularity here since the musical accompaniment to Man Ray's third film, *L'Etoile de mer*, includes a piece that was originally recorded for the film *Zouzou*, made by Allégret in 1934. See chapter three, p. 160.

[15] Judi Freeman offers an overview of this situation in, "Bridging Purism and Surrealism: The Origins and Production of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*." In *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph E. Kuenzli (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 28-45.

[16] This seems to be backed up by Man Ray in his autobiography. Although he plays down his involvement in the project, he does describe making a number of shots with Dudley Murphy before the latter entered into collaboration with Léger, who had agreed to finance the film. It is likely that these shots found their way into the final film. Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (NewYork: Bullfinch Press, 1998), p. 218.

> Tous les films que j'ai réalisés ont été autant d'improvisations. Je n'écrivais pas de scénario. C'était du cinéma automatique. Je travaillais seul. Mon intention était de mettre en mouvement les compositions que je faisais en photographie. Quant à l'appareil photo, il me sert à fixer quelque chose que je ne veux pas peindre. Mais il ne m'intéresse pas de faire de la "belle photo" au cinéma. Au fond, je n'aime pas les choses qui bougent. Peut-être est-ce parce que je suis devenu paresseux … Il faut que ce soit le spectateur qui bouge."[17]

This statement incorporates many of the questions surrounding Man Ray's filmmaking and also highlights the element of contradiction that characterises many of the comments he made about his art. What emerges as the key concern, however, is the use of film as a way of creating moving photographs, a theme that I shall return to throughout this thesis.

It is unquestionable that the cinema played an essential role in the development of Man Ray's visual ideas, allowing the qualities of one medium to feed into another. As I have already stated, it is precisely this artistic cross-fertilisation that characterises his working method and which provides a valuable starting point for any evaluation of his work in the cinema. Yet surprisingly few connections have been made between the concerns expressed in his photographic works and the content and form of his films. In Emmanuel de l'Ecotais's book dedicated to the study of his extensive activity in the field of camera-less photography, little reference is made to his first two films, *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, both of which involve the exploration of the rayograph in motion. This exclusion seems particularly striking since it is only in the time-based medium of film that Man Ray is able to create clear juxtapositions between the rayographs and the more traditional camera-based images, establishing a visual discourse that stretches beyond that of his work in still photography. In the context of a historical study of the photogram, Floris M. Neüsuss makes a fleeting reference to this aspect of *Le Retour à la raison* and notes additionally that the film "appears to be the only photogram movie in film history."[18] Man Ray's early cinematic works therefore illustrate an important dialogue between the techniques of photography and film and,

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[17] Man Ray "Témoignages," *Surrréalisme et cinéma*, special issue of *Etudes Cinématographiques*, nos 38-39, Paris, 1965, p. 43.

[18] Floris M. Neususs, "From Beyond Vision: Photograms by Christian Schad, Man Ray, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Raoul Hausmann." In: *Experimental Vision: The Evolution of the Photogram Since 1919*, Denver Art Museum (Colorado: Roberts Rhinehart Publishers, 1994), p. 10.

as such, demand a corresponding theoretical approach. Ramona Fotiade has recently drawn attention to the relationship between Man Ray's rayographs and his films through a concentration on the notion of the 'spectre', linking the indexical traces of these photographic images with certain visual techniques found in *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, such as superimposition, double exposure and the creative use of light and shadow.[19] The theme of presence and absence that is to varying extents worked into the four films on both a formal and thematic level demonstrates a common point of interest between the two media, which, up to now, remains relatively unexplored.

If these formal connections have been generally overlooked by critics of Man Ray's films, it is due largely to an insistence on artistic categorisation that characterises many accounts. Existing discussions demonstrate a tendency to isolate individual works and to read them exclusively in terms of either Dada or Surrealism, with very few analyses actually questioning the usefulness of such a framework.

Beyond Dada and Surrealism

The period during which the films were made was a crucial moment in the history of twentieth-century art, which saw the dissolution of the Paris Dada group led by Tristan Tzara and the gradual emergence of Surrealism developed by André Breton. Man Ray was involved in both groups and became a key asset to both Tzara and Breton, especially in creating new forms of photographic representation. However, his idiosyncratic personality and his dislike of any kind of artistic doctrine led him to occupy a relatively marginal position in relation to both movements, a position that allowed him both a sense of belonging and an element of artistic freedom. Despite his declared willingness to participate in the activities of both groups, he also acted as a kind of documentor, giving him a certain objective distance that he maintained throughout his life. Thus, he was not only a photographer *within* the Dada and Surrealist groups but also *of* them and many photographs featuring their various members bear his name. Yet, presence behind the camera meant absence within the frame and as a result a large number of these images do not include Man Ray

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[19] Ramona Fotiade, "Spectres of Dada: From Man Ray to Marker and Godard." A paper delivered at the International Dada Conference, *'Eggs laid by Tigers': DaDa and beyond*, Swansea University, 5-8 July 2006

himself, demonstrating a symbolic illustration of his marginality. In one comment he suggests that his involvement was more a case of being appropriated by the separate groups rather than demonstrating a straightforward affiliation: "the Dadaists and the Surrealists called me a pre-Dada and Breton called me a pre-Surrealist [...] they saw certain things, they didn't accept everything of mine any more than they did of Duchamp's philosophy. But certain things we thought seemed to fit in with their ideas, so I was accepted.[20] Throughout Man Ray's various recollections of his relations with the Dada and Surrealist groups, he refers constantly to being accepted, drawing attention to his marginal position. Although his works played a significant role in both movements, he himself remained somewhat at a distance. In his conversations with Pierre Bourgeade, Man Ray evokes his contribution to Surrealism: "S'ils choisissaient certaines oeuvres qu'ils trouvaient s'identifier à leurs idées, j'étais flatté; si on m'a invité à participer à une exposition, ou à écrire dans une revue, c'est très bien. Je trouve que ça ne change pas ma personalité."[21]

Yet despite this individualism, his films are generally perceived as demonstrating a fundamentally critical and negativist attitude towards the medium characteristic of Dada and Surrealism. J. H. Matthews states for instance that "Man Ray's experiments with film were never intended to do anything more than express dissatisfaction with the cinema as an art form and curiosity to see how difficult it might be to resist the influence of art on movies."[22] This description does little to account for the visual richness and diversity of expression contained within the four films. It also ignores the fact that each film was made within significantly varied circumstances and that Man Ray developed a different approach to the medium with each work. Furthermore, rather than "express dissatisfaction with the cinema as an art form" it would be more accurate to suggest that he tested the adaptability of film to his own methods of artistic expression. This approach would initially seem to go against the anti-aestheticism of Dada and Surrealism, but what we will see is that Man Ray's films reflect his position within the movements to which he draws attention in the two statements above, that is, the presence of elements that can be

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[20] Man Ray in an interview with Arturo Schwarz, "This is not for America," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 51, May 1977, p. 117.
[21] Man Ray in an interview with Pierre Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray*, p. 123.
[22] J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 84.

related to both Dada and Surrealism but which ultimately go beyond either artistic dogma.

Paradoxically, the general lack of understanding about the way these films alternately relate to and diverge from the practices of Dada and Surrealism can be seen to stem from the content of Man Ray's autobiography, *Self Portrait*. First published in 1963, this captivating and at times amusing account of the artist's life and career has come to dominate scholarly research in the field. Nowhere is this more evident than in discussions of his cinematic work. This is perhaps due to the relative absence of written commentaries by Man Ray himself that would explain and contextualise what initially seems to be an extremely diverse and disparate body of works. Unlike other artists who turned to film for the expression of their ideas, such as Hans Richter and Fernand Léger, Man Ray did not take a defined theoretical stance in relation to the cinema.[23] His comments on film are sparse and he is often at pains to point out that he was never particularly interested in the medium as an art form, a view that, as the following chapters will demonstrate, seems to contrast with the actual content of his films. Except for programme notes and occasional passing references in interviews and questionnaires, there are frustratingly few instances in which he engages seriously with the content of his cinematic work. In the programme notes for *Emak Bakia*, he positively dissuades any critical assessment of the film: "In reply to critics who would like to linger on the merits or defects of the film, one can reply simply by translating the title 'Emak Bakia,' an old Basque expression, which was chosen because it sounds prettily and means: 'Give us a rest.'"[24] The most interesting aspect of this particular statement is the way it reveals a distinctly Dadaist attitude in its rejection of meaning and the insistence on nothingness.[25] In presenting the film in such a way, Man Ray was clearly attempting

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[23] Some of Léger's comments about film are published in *Functions of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973). Hans Richter's comments about his own filmmaking can be found in his articles, "Dada and the Film." In: *Dada: Monograph of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf (Teufen, Switzerland: Arthur Niggli, 1957), pp. 39-43, "The Badly Trained Soul," and "Film as an Independent Art Form," in *The German Avant-Garde Film of the 1920's*, ed. Walther Schobert (Munich: Goethe-Institute, 1989), pp. 106-114.

[24] Quoted in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "Transatlantic." In: *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, ed. Merry A. Foresta (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 161.

[25] We are reminded here of Tristan Tzara's statement in his "Manifeste Dada" of 1918, that, "DADA NE SIGNIFIE RIEN. Si l'on trouve futile et si l'on perd son temps pour un mot qui ne signifie rien ... La première pensée qui tourne dans ces têtes est d'ordre bactériologique: trouver son origine étymologique, historique ou psychologique, au moins." In: *Lampisteries, précédées des Sept*

to foreground its relationship with Dada. Later comments on the film would nevertheless place empahsis on structure and meaning, revealing his attitude towards his own works to be more than a little contradictory (as we shall see, he also referred to it as a Surrealist film, creating a complex fusion of intentions). Aside from a number of brief comments, Man Ray's autobiography is the only example of a sustained discussion of his films and as such remains a valuable source of information. However, it is, by its very nature, an anecdotal description of remembered events, characterised, as autobiographies tend to be, by a nostalgic perspective of the past and, above all, a theoretical reticence.

The major problem here is that, although Man Ray's autobiographical account does not provide a theoretical background, it has nonetheless been used by many writers in the field as a basis for their interpretation of the thematic and formal characteristics of the films. This is evident in the frequent and lengthy quotations from the autobiography that feature in most studies.[26] What is most problematic about the over-reliance on this text is that Man Ray describes his films largely within the parameters of Dada and Surrealism, often restricting his discussion to sequences or procedures that most effectively demonstrate the principles of a particular movement. This is particularly the case with *Le Retour à la raison*, where the connections with Dada are constantly reiterated, obscuring the more purely plastic concerns with which the film clearly engages. He also remembers *Emak Bakia* in terms of a compliance with the 'rules' of Surrealism and *L'Etoile de mer* as a visualisation of a Surrealist poem, yet makes no real connection between the films and offers little explanation as to how and why his formal approach developed from one film to another. In the recollections of his filmmaking period, Man Ray seems to present himself as simply following the paths dictated by the movements of Dada and Surrealism, an outlook that contrasts starkly with those comments referred to earlier in which he is at pains to emphasise his individualism. Indeed, it is well known that his position was not straightforward and that his artistic sensibility consisted of a complex mixture of approaches that could be assimilated into both

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manifestes Dada, (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963), p. 21. This is all the more significant when we consider that there is little evidence to support the claim that "emak bakia" does indeed mean "leave me alone" in Basque.

[26] In Arturo Schwarz's *Man Ray: Rigour of the Imagination*, for example, the chapter on filmmaking is basically a series of quotes from the autobiography, with very little additional analysis.

movements without ever completely giving itself over to either mode of expression. Jane Livingston's examination of Man Ray in the context of Surrealist photography highlights some of these issues, arguing that, although he played a major role in the movement, his own artistic principles diverged from those established by Breton. She states: "Man Ray was perhaps too much the reflexive, dualistic Western thinker, too much the pragmatist and too much the invested classicist, ever to capitulate totally to surrealism's cultural agnosticism."[27]

In the following pages, I shall attempt to deal with some of the issues described above. This study aims to create an understanding of how Man Ray is situated at the crossroads of several experimental strands of filmmaking in the 1920s, bringing Dada and Surrealism into a dialogue with ideas derived from abstract and French Impressionist cinema. Although it too will draw from Man Ray's recollections in *Self Portrait*, these statements will be accompanied by an extensive investigation of the actual content of the films. The contradictory nature of Man Ray's reflections on his own work will be a central consideration, allowing us to understand the spirit in which they were made and to create a broader framework from which to analyse them. In doing so, it adds to the large body of research into Dada and Surrealism, providing new perspectives from which to view Man Ray's cinematic expression. The approach to Dada and Surrealism developed through these four films demonstrates a fluid interweaving of the principles related to the two movements. As Arturo Schwarz has noted: "It is hard to classify Man Ray's films; they are provocative in their originality and pioneering in their content … they are products of his deep-rooted individuality and independence. His films anticipated moods and modes. It may be said that they are the most Dada of the Surrealist film, the most Surrealist of the Dada films."[28] My own approach is similar to that of Schwarz in the privileging of Man Ray's method as individualist and distinct, interacting and playing with the ideas related to Dada and Surrealism in such a way that they can no longer be separated and simply become part of a single, idiosyncratic cinematic voice.

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[27] Jane Livingston, "The Surrealist Photography of Man Ray." In: *Amour fou: photography and surrealism*, eds. Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York; London: Abbeville Press, 1985), p. 120.
[28] Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination*, p. 286.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, each looking at a separate film in terms of the specific circumstances out of which it emerged in order to understand how various events helped to shape the individual films and the extent to which they can be considered as giving rise to particular qualities and developments. One of the most interesting aspects of Man Ray's work in the cinema is that each film, albeit to varying extents, emerged from an external stimulus. As we shall see, the first short film, *Le Retour à la raison*, was the result of Tzara's presumptuous programming of "a film by Man Ray" at the last Dada soirée, before the work even existed. The second, *Emak Bakia* was commissioned by Arthur Wheeler, a wealthy patron of the arts who was eager to support Man Ray in a new filmmaking career. A poem by the Surrealist Robert Desnos provided the stimulus for the third film and the fourth and last cinematic work was the result of another, more specific, commission by the Comte de Noailles and his wife Marie-Laure. The structure of the chapters respects the chronological development of Man Ray's cinematic activity but aims to create links between the films by constantly referring to recurring themes and concerns. As such, certain aspects will be discussed more than once if they relate to a number of films. It is hoped that, rather than creating repetition, this reiteration will draw attention to those unifying aspects of Man Ray's work, whilst also demonstrating their particular importance within a specific film.

Whilst recognising the importance of an approach that takes into account the entirety of Man Ray's involvement with the cinema, this thesis places emphasis exclusively on those works that were made for public exhibition, necessarily excluding the recently discovered short films, fragments of films and home movies. The reason for this has less to do with relevance than with a desire to establish a clear focus on the central, most important examples of Man Ray's cinematic activity, those in which his artistic interests are most clearly expressed. Another important issue is the ambiguous position of these personal documents within the artist's 'oeuvre' as such, an area that is succinctly oulined by Patrick de Haas when he states: "La difficulté réside dans la nécessité de ne pas traiter comme oeuvre d'art ce qui n'était pas pour l'artiste, et simultanément dans l'impossibilité pour le regardeur de ne pas

voir l'artiste qui se cache derrière sa pratique d'amateur."[29] It is precisely this difficult critical position with which one is faced when approaching the works that sets them apart from the four 'official' films of Man Ray's career. Although it is tempting to analyse these little-known private works from the same perspective as those in the public domain, it would ultimately be misrepresentative and misleading. This is not to say that the films in question do not deserve attention, simply that they demand an approach that takes into consideration the particular context in which they were made and which explores their ambiguous nature as works of art. This approach is undertaken by De Haas in his short article "Les home movies de Man Ray," in *Le Je filmé*, a book that provides the perfect context for this particular subject, and which reflects precisely that paradox of reception expressed in his above statement.[30] Since this thesis is concerned with the positioning of cinema within Man Ray's activity as an artist, it would be inappropriate to integrate those works which are characterised from the outset by their uncertain relationship to this activity. This area is clearly rich in possibilities for future research, opening up new avenues in the study of Man Ray's interaction with the moving image, whilst also offering a glimpse into his private life and personal preoccupations. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study I have preferred to concentrate attention on the main body of works in order to provide the clearest and most informative perspective on his cinematic output.

Chapter one examines the relationship between Man Ray's first film, *Le Retour à la raison*, and the principles of Dadaism. It explores the significance of the film's association with the last Dada soirée organised by Tzara in 1923, which has to a large extent defined the way it is understood and theorised. By looking at the intricate structure of the film, I will attempt to draw attention to the limitations of the negativist discourse into which it is frequently assimilated. It will be argued that existing discussions create an imbalance in our perception and understanding of Dada by focusing heavily on the destructive, anti-art tendencies of the movement. A consideration of how the more constructive characteristics of Dada can be detected in

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[29] Patrick de Haas, "Quelques film inconnus." In: *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, eds. Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas, p. 145.
[30] Patrick de Haas; "Les home movies de Man Ray." In: *Le je fimé* (Paris, Editions Centre Pompidou, 1995)

Man Ray's film opens up previously neglected areas of discussion. One of the fundamental questions will be: how does the element of contradiction and duality that appears as one of Dada's defining qualities relate to Man Ray's own artistic expression in *Le Retour à la raison*? This chapter also explores Man Ray's relationship to the creative principle of chance that was so important to both Dada and Surrealist forms of expression. Although the notion of Dada cinema is one of the central concerns of this section, the discussion of *Le Retour à la raison* ultimately aims to go beyond the limits of artistic categories in order to draw out those aspects of the film that most effectively demonstrate Man Ray's personal concerns. One of the main issues raised in this chapter is the approach to cinematic representation and the oscillation between abstraction and figuration that recurs as a major preoccupation in later films.

Chapter two assesses the more complex positioning of *Emak Bakia* between the different, but related, movements of Dada and Surrealism. As Edward A. Aitken has noted, this film "sits on the threshold between the playfulness of Dada and the seriousness of Surrealism."[31] The fact that *Emak Bakia* contains elements particular to both movements has led to a particularly confusing situation in which categorisation alternates between the two modes of expression, with the film often being discussed in terms of a post-Dada, pre-Surrealist approach. Post-Dada because by the time the film was made, in 1926, the official movement in Paris had definitively broken up, with many of its members either joining ranks with Breton or becoming involved in other avant-garde groups, such as International Constructivism.[32] Pre-Surrealist since, although Surrealism was officially established two years before the making of the film and had already entered into the realms of the visual arts, Surrealist expression in the cinema remained relatively unexplored.

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[31] Aitken, "Reflections on Dada and the Cinema," p. 13.

[32] Accounts of Dada and Surrealism tend to treat the two movements in terms of an unproblematic progression from one to the other, with Dada being understood as the natural precursor of Surrealism. Hans Richter, for example, states: "Neither Dada nor Surrealism is an isolated phenomenon. They cannot be separated; they are necessary conditions of one another – as a beginning must have an end, and an end a beginning. They are basically a single coherent experience reaching like a great arch from 1916 until about the middle of the Second World War." *Dada, art and anti-art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), p. 165. However, as some critics have pointed out, this perspective is misleading since it privileges the Dada-Surrealism connection over other directions taken by a number of artists associated with Dada. See, for example, David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 26-28 and John Elderrfield, "On the Dada-Constructivist Axis," *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 13, 1984, p. 5.

This chapter will therefore briefly examine the historical context before going on to discuss Man Ray's position in relation to Surrealist cinema. By looking into the way in which *Emak Bakia* interprets Surrealist principles, I hope to bring into focus some of Man Ray's more general artistic tendencies that have kept him at a certain distance from the movement. I shall focus particularly on the way the film works through formal problems that ultimately take it beyond concerns specific to either Dada or Surrealism. This includes the exploration of cinematic vision as a unique form of perception that draws attention to the difference between the human eye and the camera eye, and the relationship between objective and subjective vision.

A similar approach is adopted in chapter three through the analysis of what is generally understood to be the most Surrealist of Man Ray's films, *L'Etoile de mer*. Of central importance here is the collaboration between Man Ray and the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos. This relationship is rarely discussed, since it is widely accepted that Desnos simply provided Man Ray with an idea for the film. Yet, as I shall point out, recent research in this area has revealed Desnos's input to be more significant than previously thought. I will use this relationship as a basis for understanding the film as a fusion of sensibilities, comparing the scenario with the final film in order to draw out stylistic traits particular to each artist. This chapter therefore departs from previous approaches and, rather than providing an exclusively Surrealist analysis of the film, attempts to uncover some of its more formal qualities that demonstrate a strong link with the content of Man Ray's other films. Emphasis will therefore be placed on Man Ray's visual interpretation of the written outline – the way it reveals patterns, structures and techniques that were not part of the original scenario. This will lead ultimately to a consideration of why the film was not immediately accepted by André Breton.

It is this overlapping of disciplines that to a large extent characterises Man Ray's final film, *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé*, dealt with in chapter four. This film has attracted very little attention amongst critics and is often omitted from surveys of Man Ray's films.[33] Described by Helmut Weihsmann as "a film story

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[33] Frank Manchel's wide survey of film history, *Film Study: An Analytical Biography Volume 3* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990) refers to Man Ray's first three films as demonstrating "intriguing cubist imagery." There is no mention at all of *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé* despite the fact that the film demonstrates similar visual characteristics.

about architecture,"[34] this multi-layered piece of work defies any straightforward description. Although it is not a difficult film in terms of narrative structure, it merges a number of concerns and influences that seem to blur its central message. However, as I shall argue in this chapter, it is a crucial finale to Man Ray's filmmaking career since it represents a development and consolidation of the problems expressed in *Le Retour à la* raison, *Emak Bakia* and *L'Etoile de mer*. Made as an architectural document and inspired by the poetry of Mallarmé, *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* is the film in which Man Ray most clearly demonstrates his interdisciplinary attitude. I will explore the way these disciplines are brought together, focusing particularly on the relationship between the structure of the film and that of Mallarmé's *Un coup de Dé jamais n'abolira le hasard* to which it refers. Again, reference will be made to the historical context and the positioning of the film in relation to Surrealism. This has proved to be one of the most problematic areas of the film since, although it is often discussed in relation to the principles of the movement, it is largely dismissed due to its overtly formal preoccupations. The formalism of *Les Mystères* has been described in terms of a return to the concerns of the earlier films,[35] a characteristic that I shall explore in detail, specifically in relation to patterns of movement and representation.

As this brief outline demonstrates, each film presents a number of specific problems that require reassessment within the context of corresponding historical circumstances. Despite his desire to work alone and to develop artistic processes and techniques that would demonstrate his own concerns, Man Ray's art constantly reflects tendencies of a specific period. "Quand on me disait que j'étais en avance sur mon temps," he states, "ma réponse était invariablement: "Non! Je vis dans *mon* époque."[36] Each individual film seems to tell us something about the gradual development of avant-garde film and the association with the artistic movements of Dada and Surrealism. The paradox of Man Ray and his ability to simultaneously belong and remain on the margins must be acknowledged since it allows us to understand his films as commenting on, rather than being completely absorbed in,

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[34] Helmut Weihsmann, *Cinetecture: Film, Architektur, Moderne* (Wein: PVS Verleger, 1995), p. 85.
[35] Inez Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer*." In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph E. Kuenzli, p. 107.
[36] Man Ray in an interview with Paul Hill and Tom Cooper, *Camera*, no. 2, 1975, p. 24.

and inspired by, those movements with which they are associated. It is precisely for this reason that we must view the films from the wider perspective of Man Ray's persona if we are to fully understand their content. This is particularly important since, as I have already stated, the overall goal of this study is to provide an overview and analysis of the four films that presents them as interrelated building blocks in an entire oeuvre that, as short as it may have been, succeeded in establishing a fiercely idiosyncratic approach to the medium. It is this dual process of focusing, widening and refocusing the lens of analysis that will characterise the following discussion.

CHAPTER ONE

Between order and chaos: *Le Retour à la raison* (1923)

Man Ray had been in Paris for two years by the time he made his first film, *Le Retour à la raison*. This short period can be seen, in the context of the present discussion, as one of the most important in his career, since it is during this time that he became involved with the Paris Dadaists through his friendship with Marcel Duchamp. Perhaps the most significant detail relating to Man Ray's arrival in France is that it coincides with the moment at which a series of ruptures between members of the Dada group were to have a lasting effect on the future of the Paris art scene. His status amongst the group was concretised with an exhibition devoted to him at Philippe Soupault's Gallery, Librairie Six, shortly after his arrival in 1921.[1] Writing about this event in later years, however, Man Ray stated: "Evidently, my exhibition was the occasion and pretext for the group to manifest their antagonism to the established order and to make sly digs at those who had seceded from their movement."[2] This comment highlights the relationship between Man Ray and the Dada movement, and focuses attention on the marginal position he occupied in relation to their activities and manifestations. As the introductory chapter has already suggested, his association with the Paris group seems to be characterised by a kind of passive collaboration in contrast to the more active role he played in the New York Dada group. It is from this context that his first film, *Le Retour à la raison* must be understood.

Few avant-garde films are considered as historically significant as *Le Retour à la raison*, which was constructed for the last Dada event, *La Soirée du coeur à barbe* at the Théâtre Michel on the 7th July 1923. The circumstances that gave rise to Man Ray's first cinematic work assured its subsequent unequivocal acceptance as a Dada manifestation. In fact, the film has rarely been separated from various anecdotal descriptions of the conditions in which it was made and screened, involving Tzara's initial announcement to Man Ray a day before the event that his, then inexistent, film had been included in the evening's programme. The film, lasting

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[1] Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005), p. 261.
[2] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1998), p. 96.

just under three minutes, was hastily constructed in less than twenty-four hours and consists of a number of individual shots alternated with sequences of rayographs. According to Man Ray, his inept gluing together of the strips and the consequent intermittent projection caused by the continual breaking of the film, eventually led to an eruption of disputes and battles within the theatre during which the police were forced to intervene.[3] Thus the spirit of chance and spontaneity that surrounded the making of the film and its ability to rouse audiences of the time serve to demonstrate the principle goals of the Dada movement. *Le Retour* therefore represents a paradoxical situation in the sense that it is hailed as an archetypal work of Dadaism but one that, historically, marks the end of the movement. The majority of films that are categorised under the banner of Dada were made after 1923, historically placing the cinematic medium on the margins of Dada expression. That film is associated with the movement from the very moment of its demise raises a number of important questions about the relationship between Dada and the cinema.

The conditions that gave rise to the making of this film have in many ways prevented it from being discussed beyond very simplistic observations about its connection with the destructive tendencies of the Dada movement. Deke Dusinberre highlights this very problem when he states: "Historians of avant-garde film have perpetuated this impression by stressing the importance of the film solely in terms of its provocative intent and anarchic effect; it is never studied in terms of its content or construction."[4] Indeed, there exist relatively few in-depth analyses of *Le Retour* despite the almost universal acceptance of the film as representing one of the most important stages in the development of avant-garde cinema. When discussed, it is often subjected to a rather superficial analysis that emphasises its relationship with Tzara's brand of unwavering nihilism and his commitment to provocation and scandal as artistic principles. In many cases it is described simply as a rejection of cinematic conventions. René Clair for instance refers to the film as a "desperate but not useless revolt against descriptive and anecdotic cinema,"[5] whilst Peter Weiss states: "Le film se veut une réaction violente contre toutes les formes de

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[3] Ibid, p. 212-3.
[4] Deke Dusinberre, "*Le Retour à la raison*: Hidden Meanings." In: *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941*, ed. Bruce Posner (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2001), p. 65.
[5] Quoted in Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 291

conventions."[6] Elsewhere, the unconventional structure of the film is highlighted as expressing the fundamentally nihilist tendencies of the Dada movement. Rudolph Kuenzli states: "*Retour à la raison*, commissioned by Tzara, expresses through its anarchic arrangement of sequences and strips of rayographs Tzara's Dada spirit of spontaneity and chance, which were the Dadaists' strategies to disrupt logic and rational order."[7] Allen Thiher, extending his assessment to include Man Ray's second film, argues, "*Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia* are essentially Dadaist negations, exercises in antiesthetics that are part of the destruction of forms that the avant-garde undertook in the first part of the 1920's."[8]

Similarly Barbara Rose describes the film as "hardly more than an assemblage of unrelated images," preferring to reserve her enthusiasm for the later *Emak Bakia*, without understanding the earlier film as a necessary foundation for this second "far more ambitious" project.[9] Her discussion of *Le Retour* is restricted to a brief summary of its realisation in the context of the Dada soirée, adding simply "[a] fight broke out, so that the film was a success by Dada standards,"[10] placing emphasis on its status as a mere Dada gesture. Norman Gambill's short survey of Man Ray's films treads very much the same path, stating, "*Le Retour à la raison*, his first film, is thankfully, short, for it is amateurish – a good avant-garde student work. Except for its relationship to the evening of Dada that sparked a riot and its influence on his other works, it remains only a historical curiosity. More important is his second film, *Emak Bakia*."[11] In *Le Journal de Dada*, a section devoted to the *Soirée du coeur à barbe* is given the subtitle 'Retour à la raison', signalling the widely accepted connection between the film and the event itself. Ado Kyrou in his brief summary of Man Ray's films describes *Le Retour* in the following terms:

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[6] Peter Weiss, *Cinéma d'avant-garde*, traduit du suédois par Catherine de Seynes (Paris: L'arche éditeur, 1989), p. 23.
[7] Rudolph Kuenzli, Introduction to *Dada and Surrealist Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1996), p. 3.
[8] Allen Thiher, "The Surrealist Film: Man Ray and the Limits of Metaphor" in his *The Cinematic Muse: Critical Studies in the History of French Cinema* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979), p. 38.
[9] Barbara Rose, "Kinetic Solutions to Pictorial Problems: The Films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy," *Artforum*, September 1971, p. 70.
[10] Ibid, p. 70.
[11] Norman Gambill, "The Movies of Man Ray." In: *Man Ray: Photographs and Objects* (Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1980), p. 30.

> Man Ray, dans le but de choquer et de scandaliser par la négation de tout ce qui se faisait jusqu'alors, filma les mouvements d'une spirale en papier … et parsema la pellicule vierge d'épingles et divers objets visuels tels que des boutons et allumettes, qui impressionnèrent la pellicule d'une telle façon qu'à la projection, on avait l'impression d'assister à une curieuse chute de neige métallique. Un corps de femme nue et des lumières de foire sont les seuls éléments concrets de ce film qui, par sa nouveauté et par sa volonté de détruire le "spectacle" cinématographique, provoqua un des plus grands scandales de l'histoire dadaïste.[12]

The extent to which the film has become synonymous with the negative connotations of Dada, as represented through the final swan song that was the *Soirée du coeur à barbe*, is particularly evident here. The elements of shock and scandal that came increasingly to characterise the movement during its development in Paris and particularly in the later years prior to its demise are posited as the main driving force behind the film. By stating Man Ray's intention as that of negation, Kyrou assumes that a simple description of the material is enough to justify its Dada status. What Kyrou – indeed many other commentators working along these lines – fails to demonstrate is exactly *how* certain aspects of the film, such as the movement of a paper spiral, equate to a Dada gesture, beyond the fact that they constitute a turn away from the conventions of narrative film.

In this sense, *Le Retour* carries the burden of representing one of the most significant moments in the history of Dada and Surrealism. The fact that it was not simply shown during the event, as was the case with Richter's *Rhythmus 21*, but commissioned *for* it by Tzara, the Dada movement's central and most influential figure, has had the effect of turning it into a historical document. In which case, the formal intricacies of the film wane in importance in comparison to the Dadaist statement it is seen to make. The problem then is twofold: the historical circumstances have created a situation in which *Le Retour's* significance is tied to its Dada status, but also that this relationship is defined primarily in terms of destruction. So, whilst Thiher and others are content to highlight the "destruction of forms" and the reaction against conventional cinema in *Le Retour*, there is a distinct lack of understanding about the ways in which Dada also went further than straightforward negation. Christian Lebrat underlines these problems when he asks:

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[12] Ado Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1963), p. 174-5.

"Pourquoi le Retour à la raison ne figure-t-il dans aucune histoire "officielle" du cinéma, pourquoi l'a-t-on toujours considéré comme un exercice de provocation dadaïste, une expérience isolée, un coup d'essai ou une sorte de boutade anarchisante?"[13]

This chapter aims to develop a broader understanding of the film by drawing attention to its underlying structures. It argues that the dualistic, contradictory nature of Dadaism is a fundamental aspect, not only of *Le Retour* in particular, but also of Man Ray's work in general. As such, the analysis that follows constantly relates the content and concerns of the film back to his work in other areas, notably photography, in order to demonstrate a wider perspective that will provide a model for the following chapters. Whilst acknowledging that destruction and refusal play a role in the film, the principle point of enquiry will be the way these aspects are brought into a fusion with more constructive elements, such as the achievement of formal equilibrium.

Dada, film and performance

Before discussing particular aspects of the film in detail, it is useful to first briefly describe the historical context in which it was made and to outline some of the main principles of the Dada movement, particularly in the way they relate to the medium of film. Dada officially began in Zurich in 1916 with Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire, a cabaret nightclub that invited all kinds of revolutionary artistic expression. The climate was one of disillusionment and scepticism in the face of the violence and meaninglessness of the First World War and many artists and writers had exiled themselves to the capital of neutral Switzerland. Dada is characterised principally by its reaction to what was seen by many to be a complete disintegration of society. It was an attack on the values, morals and traditions of the bourgeois society that allowed barbaric destruction of human life on such a massive scale. The defining features of the movement are generally expressed in terms of nihilism, irrationality, meaninglessness and disorder - precisely the way in which the social, political and cultural climate appeared to a great majority of the population. The aim of Dada was

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[13] Christian Lebrat. "Attention danger! Le Retour à la raison, ou la leçon de Man Ray." In: *Jeune, Dure et Pure!: Une histoire du cinéma d'avant-garde et expérimental en France*, sous la direction de Nicole Brenez et Christian Lebrat (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 2001), p. 91.

therefore not to search for meaning or answers but simply to reflect and represent the world as it was. Art itself became one of the main targets of Dadaist expression, as the desire, expressed by Marcel Janco, to demolish everything in order to return to a 'tabula rasa', involved not just turning away from, but consciously destroying previous aesthetic forms. More important, however, was the way Dada actively criticised and questioned the role of the artist and the act of creation, reflected in Duchamp's 'ready-mades'. As part of a general reaction against logic and order, Dada expression favours chance, spontaneity and randomness.

At the end of the war and with the reopening of national borders, the movement spread throughout Europe, manifesting itself differently in each city and giving rise to a number of different 'dadaisms' (Zurich, New York, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, Paris) depending on the artists involved. It was the Romanian poet, Tristan Tzara, who brought Dada to Paris at the end of 1919, having been in close contact with the French literary circles since 1917. A number of writers whose direct involvement in the war had left them damaged and disillusioned were particularly responsive to Tzara's anarchic personality. Hans Richter states: "It was in Paris that Dada achieved its maximum volume and here that it met its dramatic end."[14] After a series of manifestos, manifestations, public demonstrations, exhibitions, soirées and the appearance and disappearance of a number of journals devoted to the movement, Paris Dada eventually ran out of steam, becoming an institution itself, much like the one it aimed to attack. The public was no longer capable of being shocked and lost interest in recycled tactics that aimed to provoke. Members of the group began to disagree on the basic principles that had initially brought them together, with many of them, including André Breton, opposing Tzara's dead-end nihilism. Despite the undeniably subversive and destructive nature of Dada, the entire movement seems to pose the fundamental question of whether 'anti-art' is at all possible, if indeed desirable. As Hans Richter, a member of the Zurich group, states, "Dada's propaganda for a total repudiation of art was in itself a factor in the advance of art." Thus the negative gesture is accompanied by a corresponding positive gesture since the artist, even when involved in the process of destruction, ultimately remains an artist, and the destruction itself becomes an 'act' of creation.

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[14] Hans Richter, *Dada: art and anti-art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 171.

Although Zurich and the Cabaret Voltaire are widely accepted as the origin of Dada, a similar attitude was being expressed in New York as early as 1915 through the activities of Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. Correspondence soon began between Tzara and the New York group and 1921 saw the publication of the first and only issue of the journal *New York Dada,* in which was published Tzara's response to Man Ray and Duchamp's letter asking his permission to use the word 'Dada' in the title: "Dada appartient à tout le monde. Comme l'idée de Dieu ou de la brosse à dent."[15] The content and layout of the journal was much more sober than the publications that appeared in other countries, such as *Dada* in Zurich and *Der Dada* in Berlin. In June of the same year, Man Ray wrote to Tzara, stating, "dada cannot live in New York. All New York is dada, and will not tolerate a rival, - will not notice dada. It is true that no efforts to make it public have been made, beyond the placing of your and our dadas in the bookshops, but there is no one here to work for it, and no money to be taken in for it, or donated to it. So dada in New York must remain a secret."[16] The letter (**Fig 5**.) was signed 'Man Ray directeur du mauvais movies' and incorporated, at the beginning and at the end, two different sections of filmstrips. One of these features the successive frames of Man Ray's own face, placed underneath his signature. The other, at the top of the letter, is that of a naked woman, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a minor, yet renowned Dada figure, whose eccentric behaviour gained her a reputation amongst the group. Sometime during 1921, Man Ray, along with Duchamp, had produced a film of the Baroness in the act of shaving her pubic hair and, although no trace of it remains, it seems that the images in the letter were taken from this film.

Thus whilst proclaiming the impossibility of Dada's existence in New York,[17] Man Ray introduces a field of artistic expression that would only later become officially part of the movement: the cinema. His reference to himself as a director of 'mauvais movies' is important in this context, since it highlights one of the central

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[15] Letter from Tristan Tzara reprinted in *New York Dada*, April 1921, p. 2.
[16] Letter from Man Ray to Tristan Tzara, reproduced in Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies* (Paris: Editions Centre Pompidou, 1997), pp. 8-9.
[17] The fundamental incompatibility of Dada with America is a theme to which Man Ray would return throughout his life. In an interview with Arturo Schwarz he stated: "You see, the idea of scandal and provoking people, which is one of the principles of Dada, was entirely foreign to the American spirit. That's why I said Dada and Surrealism do not belong here." Man Ray in an interview with Arturo Schwarz "This is Not for America," *Arts Magazine* vol. 51, May 1977, p 117-8.

MERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMER

de l'a  merique !

Cher Tzara - dada cannot live in New York. All New York is dada, and will not tolerate a rival, - will not notice dada. It is true that no efforts to make it public have been made, beyond the placing of your and our dadas in the bookshops, but there is no one here to work for it, and no money to be taken ~~ith~~ for it, or donated to it. So dada in New York must remain a secret.

No additional sales have been made of the consignment you sent to "Societe Anonyme". The "anonyme" itself does not sell anything.

The appearance of New York dada was made possible through the generosity of a few poor friends, but it cannot go on so. Perhaps in the future we may do something again.

I have not come across any confusees, but will watch for them.

What has happened between you and Picabia? I saw a little article from some French paper. It is unfortunate.

Thanks very much for the photos of yourself and friends.

I shall send you some more new york dadas.

Duchamp is returning this week to France you will meet him, no doubt, and have a talk with him.

Merci pour Mlle Bernine's sentiments! I am doing nothing of interest now to anyone or to myself!

Most cordially

man Ray

directeur du mauvais movies

Figure 5.

aspects of Dadaism, that is the rejection of the traditional notion of the skilled artist, as well as all aesthetic criteria associated with the reception of works of art. As Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out, the contradictory nature of the cinema – the artificiality of its mechanical and chemical foundation and the illusory effect of its final product – make it a "quintessentially Dada artifact."[18] Yet despite this important quality, the medium of film attracted very little attention amongst the Dadaists and few films were made during the movement's most prolific period. The cinematic experiments undertaken by Man Ray and Duchamp in New York can thus be seen as the earliest attempts to incorporate the moving image into the Dada project. The 'performative' element of the Von Freytag-Loringhoven film is particularly significant in the way it emphasises the importance of the Dada 'act' and the role of film in producing a trace or document of this act. This relationship between film and performance would later emerge as a key characteristic of certain 'neo-Dada' developments in art such as the Fluxus movement during the 1960s. The invention of video in the 1980s pushed performance art to a new level, allowing an instantaneous relationship between the act and its representation.[19] The Man Ray-Duchamp experiments in many ways pre-figure these later developments by creating a crucial link between cinema and performance as an artistic statement.[20]

One of the central questions in the discussion of film within the context of Dada is the way the movement's ambivalent attitude towards technology and the machine as representing the promise for progress – a characteristic that is most effectively expressed within the realms of New York Dada and the work of Picabia, Duchamp and Man Ray – is incorporated into a medium that is defined through its technological basis. "The Dadaists' dilemma," explains John Elderfield, "was how to be modern and progressive in a way that escaped the technological and the rational, in a way that did not damage the present in the name of the future, when the modern and the progressive meant quite the opposite."[21] The answer, in the realms of

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[18] Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed, Rudolph Kuenzli, pp. 13-14.
[19] For an overview of the emergence of video and performance art see: Dany Bloch, *Art et vidéo 1960/1980-2* (Locarno, Switzerland: Edizioni Flaviana, 1982), Michael Rush, *New Media in Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).
[20] For a discussion of the links between Dada and Fluxus in the realms of performance art, see: Michael Kirby, "Happenings: An Introduction." In: *Happenings and Other Acts*, ed. Mariellen R. Sandford (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-28.
[21] John Elderfield, "On the Dada-Constructivist Axis." *Dada/Surrealism*, No. 13, 1984, p. 9.

cinematic expression, seemed to lie in the ability of the medium to fragment and rearrange the hierarchies of experience.

However, Thomas Elsaesser has argued that the notion of Dada in the cinema is complex and depends not so much on the Dada content but the Dada *context*, bringing us back to the element of performance that characterises the Von Freytag-Loringhoven affair. He states:

> What was Dada in regard to cinema was not a specific film, but the performance, not a specific set of techniques or textual organisation, but the spectacle. One might argue that in order for a film to have been Dada it need not be made by a Dadaist, or conversely, that there were no Dada films outside the events in which they figured. "What is Dada film?" would resolve itself into the question "*When* was a film Dada?" This gives special place to the screening of *Entr'acte* as part of *Relâche* … and to the Soirée du Coeur à barbe.[22]

Therefore, our understanding of Dada film must, as Elasaesser's comment suggests, take into account the element of performance that was one of the defining characteristics of the movement.[23] The ultimately nihilist character of Tzara's Dada soirée succeeded in making out of Man Ray's film a statement about the nature of cinematic representation and spectatorship. According to Man Ray, the film broke numerous times during projection, adding to the, already tense, atmosphere in the theatre.[24] This disruption of those very conditions vital to the conventional Western cinema-viewing experience, i.e., the continuous projection and the immersion of the viewer into the world of the film, represents the ultimate Dada gesture. It is therefore

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[22] Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?," p. 19.

[23] This aspect of Dada film has gone largely unnoticed in previous studies. Mel Gordon's edited volume, *Dada Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), for example, completely overlooks the status of film within the context of the Dada performance, despite references to the *Soirée du coeur à barbe* and Francis Picabia's Swedish Ballet, *Relâche*, which took place on December 4, 1924 and for which René Clair's film *Entr'acte* was made.

[24] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 213. However, most accounts of the soirée do not mention Man Ray's film as the source of the outbreak of disputes in the theatre, but underline the volatile relationships between various members of the group as giving rise to the violence with which it is forever associated. Hans Richter, for instance, quotes Georges Hugnet's recollections of the evening: "When the time came for the performance of Le Coeur à gaz, the actors … were suddenly interrupted by violent protests from the stalls. Then an unexpected interlude: Breton hoisted himself on to the stage and started to belabour the actors … Hardly had order been restored when Eluard climbed on to the stage in his turn. This action seemed surprising in one who was a friend of Tzara. But the members of the audience were not concerned with such subtleties and the author of Répétitions was at once leapt on by a group of spectators inflamed by the preceding rough and tumble." Hans Richter, *Dada, art and anti-art*, p. 190. See also Michael Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p. 337-38.

the fragmentary nature of the entire performance that prevents the establishment of the usual film-spectator relationship. Furthermore, the discontinuous projection of the film demonstrates another aspect of Dadaism that Peter Burger defines as the central feature of the historical avant-garde generally: the conflation of art and life. The different reactions of the audience during the screening of Man Ray's film at the *Soirée du coeur à barbe*, alternated as they were by the intermittent appearance of images on the screen, would have become part of the whole cinema 'performance'. This merging of the inherent unreality of the film with the reality of the event can be seen in later Fluxus works such as Nam June Paik's *Zen For Film* (1962-64), which involves the projection of roughly one thousand feet of clear, unprocessed leader film. Here, the blank screen, the perceivable bits of dust and debris, along with the reactions of the audience, all become part of the half-hour long performance.

So, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, the context has the effect of framing and defining the content, and it is for this reason that *Le Retour*'s connection with the last Dada *soirée* should not be completely discarded. Nonetheless, it is important to shift the emphasis onto the actual content of the film if we are to understand how the relationship with Dada is expressed on a visual level. This will also allow analysis to go beyond an exclusive emphasis on destruction that characterised the context in which it was first projected. Putting aside this aspect of Tzara's *soirée*, what deductions can be made from the content of *Le Retour* and its relationship to cinematic representation? Despite the film's very short running time, the amount and diversity of cinematic innovation is breathtaking. Within these few minutes Man Ray establishes clear visual themes and motifs and poses a variety of questions about the nature of visual representation and cinematic materiality. It begins with a seemingly abstract mass that flickers across the screen for eight seconds. Although it is impossible to immediately identify the pro-filmic source of this image, its distinctly organic nature makes it difficult to attribute its strangeness to that of abstraction. The second image, a drawing pin, appears suddenly, magnified and appearing to dance across the screen independent of any external force. If the first image is characterised by ambiguity, verging on the abstract, then the second brings with it a feeling of concreteness, a reinforcement of identification with an object. A few seconds later, the drawing pin is joined and then replaced by a handful

of nails that execute a similar frantic movement. For another three seconds the first image reappears, followed by a flicker of text – sections of film onto which Man Ray wrote directly – which, when viewed at normal projection speed, is virtually imperceptible. There is then almost a second of what appears to be a blank screen, but which changes colour from grey to white and then to black. The drawing pin returns but this time in negative, so that the pin itself appears as a white object against a black background. The nails also reappear, followed once again by an unidentifiable, almost abstract mass. For two seconds, the image of a light bulb passes across the screen, followed by another two seconds of moving circular forms that spill over the edges of the frame. Except for the fleeting glimpse of the light bulb, the rayograph images dominate this section.

However, the film then changes tone. Up to this point, separate images have lasted only a few seconds, preventing the viewer from becoming fixed on any one visual sensation, producing what could be described as a 'fairground effect', bombarding the viewer with a constantly changing visual stimulus. Either by coincidence or by direct reference to this effect, the next set of images is made of up various impressions of a fairground at night. However, only the lights of the rides are perceptible to the viewer, reproducing the black and white construction of the previous sequence. Man Ray films the lights of the rotating carroussels from a static position – allowing the lights to simply move past the viewer – and also by moving the camera itself, physically following their trajectory. These shots have a generally improvised feel, most evident in the movement of the camera, which is jerky and in no way follows a smooth, pre-planned path. The next fifteen seconds of the film represent Man Ray's attempt to cinematise his own work, *Dancer/Danger* (1920). In order to give kinetic life to the static image wisps of smoke are made to float in front of it.

After being briefly exposed to the 'realism' and familiarity of the camera-based images, the viewer is once again presented with a sequence of rayographs, which involve a similar mixture of identifiable and unidentifiable objects, such as springs and spiralling forms. This is followed by another short section, an arrangement of black lines resembling the layout of a poem moving frantically from side to side. In between this and the following set of images are three frames on

which Man Ray's name appears, which again pass almost unnoticed (or at least incomprehensible) by the viewer at normal projection speed. The final section of the film consists of three optical 'experiments' that are brought together through their focus on light and movement. They can in many ways be seen to express one of the main principles of the film, and indeed much of Man Ray's work in general, that is, the ability of an external phenomenon to transform itself, expressing hidden qualities and reversing the associations traditionally attached to it. We are first presented with a spiralling piece of paper, the movement of which conceals the identity of the object for a significant amount of time. This is followed by a series of images of a suspended and rotating egg crate divider, which casts a shadow onto the wall against which it is filmed. As the crate rotates in alternate directions, a superimposition of the same object is added, making the composition all the more complex. As with the spiralling paper, the movement is executed at varying speeds. At times, the crate spins rapidly, whilst at others the movement is slower, allowing the formal details of the object to be more fully absorbed. The final images of *Le Retour* feature the only human presence in the film. In his later film, *Emak Bakia*, Man Ray would extensively explore the cinematic potential of the human form, reflecting his career-long interest in both the portrait and the naked female body. Here, again in a number of shots, a nude torso is presented in close-up in front of a window, the light from which casts complex shadows onto the body. As the torso turns, the shadows appear to mould themselves to the contours of the body, creating circular formations around the breasts. In ways similar to the image of the egg crate, the striking visual effect betrays a meticulous composition.

On first viewing, one cannot help but notice the unconventional nature of the film. In his characteristically experimental method, Man Ray subverts the rules of cinematic construction, combining images produced without the use of a camera (i.e. working directly with the filmstrip) with those created with the traditional filmmaking apparatus. Positive images are juxtaposed with negative ones and different forms of movement are presented from one image to the next. The erratic, spontaneous activity of the first half contrasts with the more studied nature of the second half. This combining of approaches and the bringing together of contrasting effects demonstrates a very clear challenge to the impression of unity that is

traditionally associated with the medium of film. *Le Retour* presents reality not as a continuous whole but as a fragmented dis-continuum that confuses and disorientates. The notion of objective reality is rejected in favour of a series of impressions or interpretations of that reality, which emphasise their own artificiality. The content of the film represents another turn away from traditional cinematic representations, opening up the debate on the relationship between form and content. Man Ray uses banal, everyday objects and phenomena as the basis of his cinematic observations, which, because of their specific, often utilitarian nature, are not traditionally subject to reproduction. Objects such as drawing pins, nails, grains of salt and pepper and bits of paper are not generally perceived in terms of their pictorial qualities. By employing the rayograph technique, Man Ray opens up the representative possibilities of film, whilst at the same time allowing the material to express hitherto hidden qualities. How else, he seems to ask, could we perceive, on the cinema screen, the expressive possibilities of a drawing pin or the patterns created by salt and pepper?

The painter, Fernand Léger, spoke of the cinema's ability to transform everyday reality and to provide the viewer with a new perceptual experience:

> Very few people like the truth, with all the risk it involves, and yet the cinema is a terrible invention for producing truth when you want. It is a diabolical invention that can unfurl and light up everything that has been hidden. It can show a detail magnified a hundred times. Did you know what a foot was before seeing it live in a shoe under a table, on the screen?[25]

Although Léger is referring specifically to the possibilities created through the use of the close-up and its presentation of a fragment of reality, Man Ray's approach demonstrates a similar process by which the cinema enhances and transforms reality. The difference is that, whilst Léger complies with cinematic conventions and accepts its technological basis, Man Ray by using the technique of rayography, allows a direct physical relationship to be brought about between the material of film and the material of reality. What brings the two approaches together, however, is the concentration on the plastic qualities of the image and the exploration of representation outside of narrative concerns.

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[25] Fernand Léger. *Functions of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 103.

Pro-visual or anti-narrative?

Aside from the combination of techniques and the nature of the material featured in the film, one of the strongest features of *Le Retour* is arguably its unconventional structure, which is often understood in terms of a rejection of narrative and therefore as representing, once again, the negative aspect of Dada. However, this aspect must be considered from the wider context of avant-garde cinema during the 1920s if we are to understand the role of narrative in relation to Dada in general and Man Ray's film in particular.

Narrative and the avant-garde film

Avant-garde cinema is regularly characterised and understood from the perspective of narrative, with the films of the 1920s frequently being discussed in terms of a counter-cinema that turned away from the then recently established trend towards storytelling and rejected those stylistic conventions now widely referred to as the classical Hollywood cinema.[26] Noureddine Ghali, in his extensive study of French avant-garde film of this period, observes:

> L'une des caractéristiques du cinéma d'"avant-garde" à partir de l'année 1924 fut le refus de toute forme de scénario traditionnel. Les cinéastes d'"avant-garde" qui se trouvaient à la pointe des recherches ont pris des positions radicales et ont cherché à éliminer de leurs films tous les développements du cinéma dramatique courant.[27]

Therefore, the collective desire to break free from the conventions of an emerging cinematic norm gave birth to a range of films without narrative continuity. Ghali states that *Le Retour à la raison*, and films such as *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger, 1924) and *Jeux des reflets et de la vitesse* (Henri Chomette, 1924) can be defined in terms of a common denominator: the total refusal of narrative. However, Ghali describes this development solely in terms of refusal and elimination – both, in effect, negative processes. So, whilst his observation helps us to understand the way

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[26] Although this term seems to centre on American filmmaking, it refers to a wider international tendency of pre-war filmmaking. See Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. *Film History: an introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p. 39.

[27] Noureddine Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1995), p. 258.

in which avant-garde film developed, bringing together the multitude of cinematic expression in terms of a single aim, it can also be counter-productive in the sense that it focuses attention primarily on the destructive, rather than constructive, qualities of this strand of filmmaking. It also encourages the understanding of avant-garde cinema solely in terms of cinematic conventions, without taking into account the fact that these films often emerge out of a desire to create a dialogue between film and other art forms. The German abstract filmmakers, who began making 'non-narrative' films slightly earlier than their French counterparts made various statements on the nature of cinema and its subservience to storytelling, an essentially non-cinematic element. However, their criticisms were mainly founded on the idea that film had not yet been allowed to demonstrate its creative potential and express itself as an art form. This, they believed, could only be achieved through a focus on form as opposed to content. So, whilst the films of Ruttman, Richter and Eggeling were essentially non-narrative, their focus was primarily the creation of a purely visual experience and not necessarily the simple destruction of narrative conventions. Although the two remain intertwined, the latter can be more accurately described as a by-product of the former. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge other historical factors that were involved in the process of making 'non-narrative' films.

The majority of those involved in the creation of avant-garde film came not from the cinema itself but from other arts such as painting and photography. The expression of movement had become a key concern in many areas of art, notably in the work of the Futurists. Many artists had become frustrated with the static nature of painting, realising its ultimate inadequacy in representing the world around them, the modern world of movement, and above all, speed. They looked towards film as a way to express sensations that depended upon movement. For the German filmmakers this most often involved eliciting physiological responses through moving abstract shapes and forms, a process that developed from a desire to create a visual analogy to music.

What must be considered therefore is whether turning away from the use of narrative as an organising principle necessarily constitutes an *act* of rejection. Referring again to Kuenzli's definition of Dada film, in which he states "Dada films are radically non-narrative, non-psychological," it can be deduced that there is a predominant tendency to view films that do not deal with narrative as 'non'

narrative, 'anti' narrative, in other words specifically *in opposition* to narrative, an attitude that is most often understood in terms of Dada's anti-art programme. Considering that the majority of films from this period have been classified in terms of Dadaism, makes the issue all the more pertinent. Indeed, in the case of *Le Retour*, the absence of a traditional narrative structure is considered primarily as a Dadaist device. As we have seen, most accounts of the film highlight the negative connotations inherent in such an approach. However what I would like to propose is that the concentration on exclusively visual elements outside of narrative concerns does not in itself constitute a rejection or negation, or to put it another way, does not automatically translate as anti-narrative. Clearly there is a need for a new theoretical perspective that goes beyond the narrative/non-narrative divide and acknowledges the unique position of particular films as occupying their own space, more or less removed from that of narrative film. What is required therefore is a more intimate understanding of the inherent concerns of individual films and the visual ideas expressed by them, thus opening up the field of avant-garde film theory. This also allows us to understand the relationship between *Le Retour* and Dadaism from a much broader perspective.

A comparison with Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, highlights the importance of this concept in relation to *Le Retour*. At the beginning of *Ballet Mécanique* a scrolling text proclaims it as "le premier film sans scénario," immediately situating it in terms of cinematic conventions. The film defines itself in terms of what it isn't and thus establishes the perspective from which it should be viewed, i.e. as a kind of counter-cinema. This is evident from the opening moments. A conventional establishing shot presents the image of a girl sitting contentedly on a garden swing. As she moves backwards and forwards we are drawn into the narrative 'normality' of the scene, momentarily forgetting the film's lack of scenario. However, this narrative identification is abruptly destroyed when a rapid, barely perceptible, montage of unrelated images (a bottle, a hat and a triangle) unexpectedly appear onscreen. That this is followed by an isolated pair of lips breaking into a smile leaves us in no doubt about the intentions of this opening sequence: to first highlight the conventions and then destroy them. The girl does not reappear until the very end, further highlighting the film's parodic nature, since these images remain entirely without function or

meaning beyond subverting the narrative expectations of the viewer. In the middle of the film, there is also the inclusion of a newspaper headline, stating "On a volé un collier de perles de 5.000.000," again hinting at the dramatic cues of narrative film. When the individual letters of the headline transform themselves into abstract forms, the rejection of this device becomes clear.

Similarly, in Rene Clair's film *Entr'acte*, of 1924, there are continual references to narrative conventions, such as the cause and effect relation of one image or scene to that of another. When a man, attempting to shoot an egg that is being held in the air by a fountain of water, is shot and killed (for no apparent reason) by another man, the film cuts to a funeral scene. However, the subsequent action reveals this to be no more than a pretext to take the viewer on a visual (and literal) roller coaster to an illogical and nonsensical ending. Another example of the viewer's expectations being highlighted and subverted is the repetition of the image of a dancing ballerina, shot from directly below so that only the feet, legs and skirt are visible. When, finally, the ballerina is revealed to be a bearded man, it is clear that it is not simply the image itself that is of importance but the effect that is created through the subversion of social and cinematic conventions. In *Le Retour* on the other hand, it is the focus on the image that predominates over any other concern, in a way that does not strictly relate the rejection of narrative. Unlike the other two films, there is a distinct lack of cues that would signal an outright subversion of conventions. That narrative has been replaced by a focus on the purely visual is apparent to the viewer from the outset. The process evidenced in *Ballet Mécanique* and *Entr'acte*, whereby conventions are outwardly pointed out and subsequently torn apart is a key characteristic of Dadaism but does not seem to play such a key role in *Le Retour*. It instead highlights an aspect of Dada that has less to do with narrative destruction and subversion than with the return to an earlier form of cinematic spectatorship.

A cinema of attractions

Despite the frequent concentration on its non-narrative quality, few accounts of *Le Retour* have looked seriously into the questions it raises about the film-spectator relationship. It seems to be a general assumption that, in rejecting traditional forms of

cinematic construction, Man Ray also problematises the smooth transmission of meaning typical of commercial cinema of the period by presenting a series of seemingly unrelated images. Yet, as Merry Foresta points out: "As a filmmaker [Man Ray] realised it was not the narrative of the cinema that the audience found compelling but the often delightfully incongruous dramas emerging from unexpected juxtapositions."[28] This observation suggests that, in making films that are at odds with the reliance on accepted narrative principles, Man Ray did not simply adhere to the principles of rejection and negation, but in actual fact turned towards what he saw as a fundamental element of cinematic construction, that is, the concentration on the purely visual. In other words, he does not aim to shock the viewer so much as to appeal to their visual sensibility, which is, as Foresta suggests, stronger than their desire for narrative causality. This can be understood specifically in relation to Tom Gunning's notion of the 'cinema of attractions'. Whilst the spectator is denied the pleasure of narrative absorption, they are presented instead with a series of visual attractions, designed for the most part to reveal and revel in the creative possibilities of the cinema. Gunning observes that the avant-garde film continues an early fascination evident in the films of Lumière and Méliès, which "sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power … and exoticism."[29] Gunning states that this early tendency

> directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself. The attraction to be displayed may also be of a cinematic nature, such as the early close-ups … or trick films in which a cinematic manipulation (slow motion, reverse motion, substitution, multiple exposure) provides the film's novelty.[30]

Drawing on Sergei Eisenstein's formulation of the 'attraction' as having a 'sensual or psychological impact' on the spectator, in direct opposition to the passive immersion

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[28] Merry A. Foresta, "Listening to Light." In: Man Ray, *Man Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 8.
[29] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." In: *Early Film: Space, Frame, Narrative,* ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990), p. 57.
[30] Ibid, p 58.

in conventional illusionism, Gunning highlights the similar exhibitionist approach of avant-garde cinema and the desire to transcend the narrative limits of the medium.

However, Eisenstein's formulation of the (theatrical) attraction is based on the direct reaction of the audience and is "mathematically calculated to produce certain emotional shocks."[31] The attraction is thus a political tool, used to manipulate the audience towards a desired response. Eisenstein places the attraction in opposition to the 'trick', which he describes in terms of pure spectacle, where the artist draws attention to his or her creative talent. So, although Eisenstein's formulation would seem to stand in opposition to Gunning's appropriation of it, the avant-garde film, as represented by *Le Retour*, marks out a middle ground between the political attraction and the pure spectacle of the trick, a dichotomy that, interestingly, seems to mirror the way Man Ray fuses Dada with his more aesthetic concerns. Rather than simply draw attention to the artist-as-magician[32], the 'attraction' of the avant-garde film provokes a change in the traditional conditions of film viewing and the psychological responses made by the audience.[33] As David Macrae argues, the purely visual aspect of the avant-garde film

> urges an empowered, active engagement of the viewer's faculties, which transcends the conventionalised closed-circuit aesthetic treadmill interlocking the artefact with the authorial presence of the artist and onlooking passive participation of the viewer. Perhaps more than any other examples of early avant-garde artefact, such as photo-montage, assemblage, installation, or ready-made, it is the avant-garde film which most lucidly – if unsettlingly – presented itself as a work of art purely by inviting, strangely and seductively, the urge to participate in the process of understanding vision through embracing construction of image.[34]

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[31] Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions." In his *Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 181.

[32] Elza Adamowicz refers to this as one of the most important aspects of Dada and Surrealist film, in which the filmmaker, in cinematically cutting up the female body, plays the role of magician. "Bodies Cut and Dissolved: Dada and Surrealist Film." In: *Gender and French Film*, ed. J. Williams and A. Hughes (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p. 22.

[33] Christian Metz has argued that the history of narrative cinema has given rise to a conditioned state of mind in the viewing subject. He refers to this as the "mental machinery" of cinema, which "adapts [the audience] to the consumption of film." *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1982), p. 7.

[34] David Macrae, "Painterly Concepts and Filmic Objects." In: *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 152-3.

A crucial element of this relationship is the way both practices involve a direct relationship between the filmmaker and the viewer. To return to Gunning:

> The aesthetic of attraction addresses the audience directly … Rather than being an involvement with the narrative action or empathy with character psychology, the cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer's curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment.[35]

Throughout *Le Retour*, Man Ray uses a number of techniques that focus specifically on the act of viewing. The spectator is invited to unravel the mystery contained within the shots ("what am I looking at?") and to understand the process of visual transformation. Gunning's reference to cinematic novelty provides an interesting framework from which to view the film. For Man Ray, the cinema was indeed a novelty, a medium that opened up new creative possibilities and allowed him to extend his visual explorations. Many aspects of *Le Retour* attest to this position, betraying a certain fascination with the transformational powers of cinematic movement and techniques such as superimposition. Were the film intended as a simple negation, as many have suggested, it would surely not engage in such meticulous compositions, such as the moving paper spiral, the egg box divider and the nude torso, simply to shock the spectator. It presents instead a process by which visual certainties are questioned and replaced with seemingly limitless possibilities of representation. The film progresses through a series of moving photographic compositions, which, through their shared visual characteristics, actively invite the viewer to make formal connections between them. A key indicator of this relationship is the emphasis on movement, which creates a kind of continuity from one shot to another. Man Ray is clearly interested in the quality of movement but as Barbara Rose has pointed out, this rarely extends to the movement of the camera itself. Each section appears as a carefully composed illustration of different cinematic effects and their ability to transform the nature of the object being presented. For example, we are invited to consider the strange magnified image of a

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[35] Tom Gunning. "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator." In: *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (5th ed.), eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Coen (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 825.

drawing pin dancing across the screen, its usually banal and everyday status making its sudden grandiose appearance all the more mesmerising. Since there was no camera involved in the creation of this particular image, the apparent movement of the object itself becomes all the more significant. The viewer's attention is drawn to the fact that the movement of the filmstrip through the projector turns a succession of static images into an *impression* of movement. This self-reflexive device forces us into an awareness of the illusory nature of cinema, one of the key Dada strategies of questioning and breaking open the representation of social reality. Man Ray therefore makes use of a self-reflexive approach to create an element of surprise or wonder that derives from an early pre-narrative concentration on the purely visual nature of the cinema.

What seems to have prevented *Le Retour* from being considered seriously from this perspective is the continued insistence on its negative qualities and its position in terms of a 'cinema of refusal'. One of the major characteristics of this approach is the over-emphasis on the role played by chance and its relationship to notions of illogic and disorder.

Chance, logic and order

Chance, submitting oneself to unknown, unmediated forces, was of crucial importance to the Dada movement, since it was the principal means by which logic and order could be overthrown. The privileging of chance in the creative process was generally understood as bringing about a more truthful representation of reality through the suppression of rationalist thought. Automatism, as it became known during the Surrealist years[36], referred to the process of speaking, writing, drawing or painting in a spontaneous manner or 'without thinking'. This involves a suppression of the conscious, rational mind, allowing the unconscious, the part of the brain that is usually latent during waking life, to be expressed. Although automatism only became codified and theorised within Surrealist discourse, automatic processes also played a significant role in Dada art and writing. Tzara's *First Dada Manifesto* of 1918 is, to a

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[36] Surrealist automatism was largely inspired by André Breton's readings of Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, both of whom had written about the therapeutic effects of free association in which the hypnotised patient speaks in a 'stream-of-consciousness'-like dialogue. Chapter two discusses the Surrealists' creative use of automatism in more detail.

large extent, characterised by this 'stream-of-consciousness' style, jumping from one thought to another without any real sense of logic or progression:

> Pour lancer un manifeste il faut vouloir: A.B.C., foudroyer contre 1, 2, 3, … Imposer son A.B.C. est une chose naturelle, - donc regrettable. Tout le monde le fait sous une forme de crystalbluff-madone, système monétaire, produit pharmaceutique, jambe nue conviant au printemps ardent et stérile. L'amour de la nouveauté est la croix sympathique, fait preuve d'un jem'enfoutisme naïf, signe sans cause, passager, positif. Mais ce besoin est aussi vieilli. En donnant à l'art l'impulsion de la suprême simplicité : nouveauté, on est humain et vrai envers l'amusement, impulsif, vibrant pour crucifier l'ennui. Au carrefour des lumières, alerte, attentif, en guettant les années, dans la forêt.[37]

Whilst we can, from this excerpt, pick out a thread of an argument, the status of the manifesto as an exercise in writing freed from the normal constraints of intellectual logic are clearly evident. Tzara continually thwarts the reader's desire for each word and sentence to build towards some kind of coherent statement. As if in anticipation of this, he periodically alerts his audience to the Dada state of mind through self-reflexive cues, such as 'a naïve don't-give-a-damn attitude', 'without rhyme or reason' and 'impulsive and vibrant'.

In the visual arts, chance was employed by a number of artists associated with Dada. Long before the 'frottages' of Max Ernst or the automatic drawings of Joan Miro and André Masson, artists such as Jean Arp in Zurich and Marcel Duchamp in Paris were allowing chance to become the main element of their work. Using a similar process in which objects were randomly dropped onto a surface and fixed into position, Arp and Duchamp invented a new system in which conscious intention becomes only the secondary aspect of the work. Man Ray, whilst still in New York, had also seized on the element of chance whilst working on *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with her Shadows* (1916). Here he describes the way in which he became aware of the creative possibilities of chance:

> I began by making sketches of various positions of the acrobatic forms, each on a different sheet of spectrum-coloured paper, with the idea of suggesting movement not only in the drawing but by a transition from one colour to

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[37] Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada 1918." In his *Lampisteries, précédées des Sept manifestes Dada*, (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963), p. 19-20.

> another. I cut these out and arranged the forms into sequences before I began the final painting. After several changes in my composition I was less and less satisfied. It looked too decorative and might have served as a curtain for the theater. Then my eyes turned to the pieces of coloured paper that had fallen onto the floor. They made an abstract pattern that might have been the shadows of the dancer or an architectural subject, according to the trend of one's imagination if he were looking for a representative motive. I played with these, then saw the painting as it should be carried out.[38]

In a way similar to the process used for Duchamp's *Standard Stoppages* or Arp's series of abstract collages, the arrangement of Man Ray's pieces of paper representing the contours of cut-out images could be seen to express his unconscious thought, since the trajectory taken by them was determined by an automatic gesture of the hand as it threw them onto the floor. It is useful here to compare Man Ray's recollections of *The Rope Dancer*'s construction with Tzara's instructions for the making of a Dada poem:

> Prenez un journal.
> Prenez des ciseaux.
> Choisissez dans ce journal un article ayant la longueur que vous comptez donner à votre poème.
> Découpez l'article.
> Découpez ensuite avec soin chacun des mots qui forment cet article et mettez-les dans un sac.
> Agitez doucement.
> Sortez ensuite chaque coupure l'une après l'autre.
> Copiez consciencieusement
> dans l'ordre ou elles ont quitté le sac.
> Le poème vous ressemblera.
> Et vous voilà un écrivain infiniment original et d'une sensibilité charmante, encore qu'incomprise du vulgaire.[39]

Just as Man Ray recognised the artificiality of conscious intention and ultimately embraced the beauty of his unconscious (or automatic) creation, so too does Tzara reject all illusions of artistic skill in advocating a direct expression of the mind through chance compositions (in fact, in his emphasis on the simple processes of cutting and pasting, Tzara seems to encourage a regression to the kind of artistic activity carried out by children). However, despite their insistence on a random,

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[38] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 60.
[39] Tristan Tzara, *Lampisteries, précédées des Sept manifestes Dada*, p. 24.

disorderly approach to the creative process, Tzara's guidelines betray an underlying element of ordered intention that seems to question the possibility of pure chance. The very act of chosing the newspaper, isolating particular words, placing them in a bag, taking them out one-by-one, and then copying them 'carefully', represents a controlled framework from which the chance creation is born. From the ironic tone of these instructions and the inherent contradiction in providing guidelines for the production of a Dada work of art, it is clear that Tzara was aware of the paradoxical issues involved in the notion of chance. These issues are similarly expressed in Man Ray's use of chance as a creative method. Much more so than Duchamp and Arp, Man Ray incorporates unconscious expression into an ordered practice, controlling and structuring it in such a way as to bring about a creative tension between conscious and unconscious, chance and order.

Rayography

The element of chance plays a significant role in *Le Retour* and has remained a key concern in discussions of the film. This emphasis seems to relate to the context in which it was made, with Tzara's last-minute request, as I have already noted, requiring Man Ray to quickly produce some extra footage. It had apparently been Tzara's idea to employ the same process of camera-less image production, rayography, to the medium of film. Man Ray's still rayograph images had already been appropriated by the Paris Dada group by way of Tzara, who wrote the preface for a catalogue of twelve such images published in 1922 as *Champs délicieux*.[40] This publication was announced a few months earlier in the Dada journals *Le Coeur à barbe* and *Les Feuilles libres*, firmly situating the new photographic method within Dada discourse. Furthermore, the title of the catalogue was a reference to an earlier publication by André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques*, a collection of their automatic poems.[41] An analogy was thus made between the process of '*écriture automatique*' and that employed by Man Ray to produce the traces and imprints of objects in the rayographs. His initial discovery of the process, the details of which are now widely known, is itself hailed by commentators as the ultimate chance event. Whilst developing prints in his darkroom, he had accidentally

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[40] Man Ray, *Champs délicieux* (Paris: Société générale d'imprimerie et d'édition, 1922).
[41] André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques* (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1920).

placed a couple of objects on a sheet of photosensitive paper. When he turned on the light he noticed the shadows of the objects gradually appear. An accident that turned out to be one of the turning points in his career and a dual demonstration of the way chance can be used artistically.

Although Man Ray was not the first photographer to use the camera-less process – the first photograms were produced by Henry Fox Talbot in 1835 and Christian Schad, a member of the Zurich Dada group began experimenting with the technique around 1918, followed by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy – he explored it so vigorously that it became one of his trademarks, and attracted the attention of both the Dadaists and later the Surrealists to the poetic potential of photography. Yet a number of critics have expressed doubt in relation to the authenticity of Man Ray's account. Tzara had been in close contact with Schad in Berlin and had in his possession a number of camera-less images produced by him. As Jan Svenungsson argues, it is highly probable that Tzara had shown these images to Man Ray, encouraging him to produce similar effects.[42] In any case, in the transformation of the term 'photogram' into 'rayograph' Man Ray asserted his authorial control over the technique and became its principal practitioner. Throughout the 1920s, these rayographs illustrated a range of Dada and Surrealist journals, becoming the official mode of photographic expression associated with the movements. In commentaries by both Dada and Surrealist writers, it was often the element of automatic visual poetry that was highlighted and celebrated.[43] The rayographs were said to express the poetic hand of the artist or the secret aura of the object (these qualities will be discussed in more detail at a later stage), but were mostly admired for the way in which they eschewed the reliance upon the technical apparatus of the photographic medium. The relationship between the photographer and reality was no longer defined in terms of distance and mechanical intervention, but could achieve the same level of self-expression and subjective interpretation of reality as the writer or painter.

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[42] Jan Svenungsson, "The Making of Man Ray." In: *Man Ray* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2004), p. 31. See also Emmanelle de l'Ecotais, "Man Ray: An American in Paris." In: *A Transatlantic Avant-Garde: American Artists in Paris, 1918 – 1939*, ed. Sophie Levy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 139-141.

[43] Karel Teige, for example, referred to one of Man Ray's Rayographies as "un poème de lumière parfait." "Le Cas Man Ray," in *Zivot*, No 2, 1922. Reprinted in Emmanuelle de l'Ecotais. *Man Ray: Rayographies* (Paris: Éditions Leo Scheer, 2002), p. 169.

It is from this perspective that rayographs can be seen to open themselves up to the forces of chance, but also to the notion of negation, both crucial aspects in existing accounts of *Le Retour*. In his autobiography, Man Ray remembers the manner in which he went about creating the extra rayograph footage for the film, stating:

> Acquiring a roll of a hundred feet of film, I went into my darkroom and cut up the material into short lengths, pinning them down on the work table. On some strips I sprinkled salt and pepper, like a cook preparing a roast, on other strips I threw pins and thumbtacks at random; then turned on the white light for a second or two, as I had done for my still Rayographs. Then I carefully lifted the film off the table, shaking off the debris, and developed it in my tanks. The next morning when dry, I examined my work; the salt, pins and tacks were perfectly reproduced, white on a black ground as in X-ray films, but there was no separation into successive frames as in movie films. I had no idea what this would give on the screen. Also, I knew nothing about film mounting with cement, so I simply glued the strips together, adding the few shots first made with my camera to prolong the projection.[44]

This extract raises a number of important questions for a discussion of *Le Retour* in relation to the Dada principles with which it is frequently associated, since Man Ray seems at pains to emphasise a casual, haphazard process of creation. Indeed, the most interesting aspect of the film seems to derive from the relationship between the artist and his material. Man Ray's description of his method of filmmaking as analogous to that of a cook preparing a roast subverts conventional notions of the cinema as involving a high level of technical expertise and requiring a certain amount of pre-planning and logic. By taking away the cinematic apparatus and submitting the filmmaking process to the laws of chance, Man Ray rejects the very basis of the art form, just as he had rejected the conventions of photography by the same means.

Although *Le Retour* demonstrates a turn away from the structures of conventional filmmaking, the use of chance as a creative method does not automatically equate to the destruction of logic, as argued by Rudolph Kuenzli for example. Although he describes his application of the rayograph process to the strips of film in terms of a random and inattentive method and a lack of knowledge about the final result, Man Ray was not entirely ignorant to the effects that could be created

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[44] Man Ray, *Self Portrait,* p. 212.

with different kinds of objects. Looking at some of the photographic images he produced using the same technique during this period, one can detect an increasing awareness of the way particular forms and textures could be juxtaposed to create compositional tension. Referring to the way chance plays a role in another of his photographic techniques, the process of solarization,[45] Man Ray states: "Avant c'était le hasard. C'est moi qui l'ai pris sérieusement, qui l'ai perfectionné, qui l'ai contrôlé, pour obtenir une certaine qualité … on croyait que j'avais retouché mes photos, mes négatifs, que j'avais cerné le sujet avec une ligne noire. Mais c'était un procédé connu … et je l'ai contrôlé pour le répéter. Alors quand on répète une chose, ce n'est plus le hasard."[46] This tension between chance, repetition and control can equally be understood in relation to the rayograph technique and its use in the film.

Thus, it is safe to say that the objects would have been selected with some element of foresight as to the kind of visual impression they would leave once the strips had been developed. With this in mind, is it by chance that a single drawing pin is juxtaposed with multiple nails, producing a kind of visual harmony? Similarly, can we simply attribute to chance Man Ray's choice to begin *Le Retour* with the strip of film on which he had placed grains of salt and pepper, rendering identification of the image impossible and thus plunging the viewer into a state of confusion? Furthermore, if we examine closely the structure of the film, it seems unlikely that the separate sections were assembled without any consideration of visual progression, a key aspect that will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Photographic compositions

Yet even if we accept that chance plays a role to a certain extent – Man Ray could not have accurately predicted the exact nature of the impression of movement created during projection in placing the objects onto the filmstrip – it cannot be related to those sequences already produced before Tzara's request. These sections strongly suggest their status as studies in light, form and motion, once again calling to mind Man Ray's declaration (outlined in the introduction) that his initial interest in film

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[45] Solarization, or the 'Sabatier Effect', refers to a process in which the photographic plate is briefly exposed to light during developing, creating a reversal of tones so that part of the negative image appears as positive. In Man Ray's solarized photographs, the image appears with a dark black outline around the edges, giving rise to a kind of halo-effect.

[46] Man Ray in a televised interview, *Man Ray, photographe* (1961).

was to create moving versions of his still compositions. Indeed, they reflect some of the recurring themes in his work: the naked female body, spiralling forms and complex compositions of an object and its shadow. That he filmed his own static work, *Dancer/Danger* (**Still 7**), and incorporates a brief glimpse of what looks like a moving version of his 'anti-poem' (**Still 9**) attests to his desire to explore the way in which his previously developed visual ideas could be enhanced through motion. As such, these moments take on a more constructed quality, displaying little of the spontaneity that characterises the rest of the film.

Whilst Man Ray clearly draws attention, in his autobiography, to the process by which the rayograph images were created and the specific conditions that gave rise to them, he is particularly evasive in his description of these traditionally filmed sections that make up the latter half of the film:

> I made a few sporadic shots, unrelated to each other, as a field of daisies, a nude moving in front of a striped curtain with the sunlight coming through, one of my paper spirals hanging in the studio, a carton from an egg crate revolving on a string – mobiles before the invention of the word, but without any aesthetic implications nor as a preparation for future development: the true Dada spirit.[47]

His reference to 'sporadic shots' is interesting since it insists on their trivial nature. In contrast with the description of the rayographs, we are given very little information about the construction of these shots and the state of mind with which they were approached, outside, of course, the vague reference to the Dada spirit. Considering this account, it seems that Man Ray was more compelled to foreground the connection with Dadaism than to point to any specific aesthetic framework, positively avoiding the notion that any part of the film could have been the result of an 'artistic' approach – the perceived enemy of Dadaism. Yet few critics have been concerned about this omission, preferring, like Man Ray, to concentrate on those areas of the film that attest to its significance in terms of one clear goal: reaction, rejection, negation, subversion – the nihilist tendencies of Dada.

Yet, as we shall see, these individual sections develop a consistency, not only with each other, but also with the sequences of rayographs against which they are

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[47] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 211.

placed. Although Man Ray describes these images as unrelated – a view which would be recycled for many years to come – they are only unrelated in terms of content. A naked torso has little in common with a suspended paper spiral or an egg carton so their juxtaposition is therefore accepted as a subversion of the linearity and logic of conventional film. However, to subscribe to such a limited interpretation is to ignore one of the film's unifying themes, that is the building of a simultaneous awareness of similarity and difference, through the use of techniques such as isolation and movement of the object. Few discussions that point out the disparity between the objects themselves look further into their representative complexities. The short section in *Le Journal du Dada*, for instance points out that the objects have little in common with each other but also mentions that the nude torso is *moving* and that the egg crate is *turning*, no doubt paraphrasing Man Ray's own description in his autobiography. The same source also refers to the presence of light but its significance to the main concerns of the film is left unexplored. The intricate relationship between form and content is one of the major characteristics of the film, taking it beyond the idea of a straightforward negation, yet to arrive at such an interpretation requires looking beyond Man Ray's own description of the film. Therefore, if *Le Retour* is to be related to Dadaism, it necessarily poses crucial questions about the nature and role of Dada itself. Where does negation end and creative construction begin? Although the scope of this question is too vast to be fully explored here, it is nonetheless possible to relate some of the constructive tendencies of Dada, the desire to create a new order from the chaos, to the structures that emerge from Man Ray's film.

Visual structures

It should be clear by now that the element of chance in *Le Retour* does not appear in isolation and that the very notion of chance is intricately related to questions of logic and order. This duality that exists at the centre of Man Ray's film creates a very strong visual framework according to which the seemingly random material develops. It is from this perspective that, from a film that has been so often described in terms of destruction, incongruity and illogic, emerge patterns of structure and a sense of underlying order. This aspect of the film has been referred to

by a number of writers but never fully developed. Michael O'Pray states: "Although *Return to Reason* is renowned as a fairly arbitrarily structured film in the Dada spirit, there are nevertheless strong unifying aspects to it."[48] I would argue that the unifying aspect in fact lies *within* its structure rather than *despite* it, but before going on to discuss this point in more detail, it is necessary to broach the issue of juxtaposition, which, as we have already seen, is often used in descriptions of the film's structure.

Juxtaposition and visual transformations

In the section on narrative, I have discussed the way in which Man Ray replaces traditional narrative structures with a system of 'attractions' that effectuates a change in the relationship between the film and the spectator. Using Merry Foresta's comment about Man Ray's approach to narrative, I have suggested that the organisation of the material is based on purely visual rules of progression. In order to expand on this point in the context of the visual structure of the film, I would like to return briefly to this statement by Foresta. Whilst this comment draws attention to the nature of Man Ray's turn away from narrative, it also points to a common misunderstanding of his films, notably the physical organisation of the visual material. Foresta makes reference to incongruity and 'unexpected juxtapositions', which more or less treads the same path as the views already discussed, that is, understanding the material in terms of difference and conflict. Arturo Schwarz also develops this idea, stating: "In Man Ray's films, surprise is achieved through the chance coupling of different realities."[49] The bringing together of unrelated material was of course one of the principle techniques of Surrealism, defined by Breton as 'convulsive beauty' and based on Lautréamont's phrase – "Beautiful as the unexpected meeting, on a dissection table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella."[50] Man Ray was familiar with the French poets by whom the movement of Surrealism

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[48] Michael O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 19.
[49] Arturo Schwarz, p 288.
[50] André Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 65. Translation from Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 21.

was largely influenced and has stated: "quand j'ai lu Lautréamont, j'ai été fasciné par la juxtaposition des objets et des mots inusités."[51]

But a closer look at Man Ray's work reveals that it was not a straightforward juxtaposition of images in which he was primarily interested. Jane Livingston highlights this aspect in relation to his photography. "In his best photographs," she argues, "Man Ray was seldom concerned with overt juxtapositions of unlike things per se. He wanted instead to let the main object, whether a woman's body or a pair of painted hands, express its own capacity for self-transformation and for impinging on other objects in terms dictated by itself."[52] Similarly, in *Le Retour*, a significant number of images involve the object in isolation, and, aside from the rayograph sequences, comparisons are made only by editing the sections together. But even here, juxtaposition is not presented in order to draw on the incongruous placement of one image next to another (within the sequence), since this notion of juxtaposition depends on the reception of the images in terms of content. For such a contrast to involve a shock or surprise element, the objects must be imbued with a strong sense of realism, with their identity being clearly defined. But, as we shall see in the next section on abstraction, many of the images push the boundaries of cinematic representation, approaching but never completely surrendering to visual abstraction. Man Ray plays with notions of signification through the use of certain constructed objects, such as the egg crate divider and the paper spiral, which transmit meaning only on the level of form and thus turn away from relationships based on content. From this perspective, the images in *Le Retour* transcend difference in order to achieve a harmonious balance between formal similarity and contrast. This brings us back to Foresta's initial comment and her use of the term 'dramas' to describe cinematic effects that are ultimately unrelated to narrative. There is thus an implication of the presence of structure akin to that of the traditional cause and effect relationship of narrative, where visual transformations taking place through time mirror thematic developments.

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[51] Man Ray, "Témoignages," in *Surrréalisme et cinéma*, special issue of *Etudes Cinématographiques*, Nos. 38-39, Paris, 1965, p. 43.

[52] Jane Livingston, "Man Ray and Surrealist Photography." In: *L'Amour fou: photography and surrealism*, eds. Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York, London: Abeeville Press, 1985), p. 128.

Patterns of duality

These considerations are especially important in terms of Dadaism, since the movement expresses a desire for both destruction and construction, chaos and order, which are often brought into a creative balance. To quote Elderfield again, "Dada is a transfer point between the old and the new; it destroys common-sense outward appearances so as to purify the language of expression, which can then tell of a world that is itself more pure. This is all necessary because the old world is shattered and in chaos. Dada both mirrors its chaos and from within this chaos offers a glimpse of a new world."[53] As Elderfield's essay demonstrates, this crossover between destruction and construction led to a dialogue between Dada and International Constructivism in the early 1920s and can be seen particularly in the work of artists such as Hans Richter.[54] The path that led a number of artists from Dada to Constructivism offers an alternative view to that which represents Dada as developing singularly and un-problematically into Surrealism. Thus, the overlapping tendencies of Dada-Surrealism and Dada-Constructivism create a new perspective from which to view the works of this particularly indeterminate period. Indeed, Richter's films can be seen to weave a complex path between these different artistic affinities, the Dada-Constructivist tendencies of the earlier graphic films, such as *Rhythmus 21* (1921) and *Rhythmus 23* (1923), giving way to the later Dada-Surrealist *Filmstudie* (1926) and *Vormittagsspuk (Ghosts Before Breakfast*, 1927). However, if this loose categorisation seems somewhat arbitrary, it is used only to demonstrate an interrelationship that becomes crucial in the formal analysis of *Le Retour*, the film that perhaps most effectively plays the destructive against the constructive.

These two poles of expression are related to both chance and order and unconscious and conscious expression. Eric Sellin has argued that both Dada and Surrealism, despite their emphasis on chance and automatism, actually display "numerous spontaneous patterns of order." [55] His discussion is based on the notion

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[53] John Elderfield, "On the Dada-Constructivist Axis," p. 6.

[54] This tendency is most expressed in German Dada, especially in the abstract work of Jean Arp and the Hanover-based Kurt Schwitters, as well as Richter. In September 1922 Richter, Hausmann, Tzara, Arp and Schwitters attended the 'Dada-Constructivist Congress' in Dusseldorf, where they made contacts with Constructivist artists, Theo van Doesburg, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitsky. John Elderfield, p. 12.

[55] Eric Sellin. ""Le chapelet du hazard": Ideas of Order in Dada-Surrealist Imagery," *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 2 no. 4, Summer 1980, p. 25.

that the fundamental difference between Dada and Surrealism is "the degree to which the particular poet or artist recognized the validity of some poetic "interference" from the conscious world."[56] Whilst Breton, in his pursuit of pure automatic expression – the ultimate goal of Surrealism – rejected any kind of conscious ordering of these unconscious productions, much Dada and Surrealist art and literature is characterised by a subtle tension between chance and order. So, in Arp's collages mentioned above, the very act of fixing the pieces of coloured paper thrown at random could be perceived in terms of the chance world of the unconscious coming into play with the more ordered conscious processes. Looking at Tzara's 1918 manifesto, these tensions or dichotomous relationships can be evidenced in his statement that "Order = disorder; ego = non-ego; affirmation = negation: the supreme radiations of an absolute art."[57] This was a fundamental aspect of Dada, where destructive tendencies inevitably led to constructive ones.

Throughout *Le Retour*'s short duration disparate elements come together to form what I shall call a progression of 'harmonious contrast', which seems to reflect Sellin's notion of the polar or binary image. This can be seen to operate on a number of levels, the first of which emerges through the combination of images derived from radically different techniques – rayograph and camera-based. *Le Retour* is the only film in which Man Ray intertwines the two types of images. Although rayographs appear in *Emak Bakia*, they are placed together at the beginning, forming a sort of visual prelude. They establish the tone for the rest of the film in that they point to the destabilisation of vision that is to follow. By contrast, the visual discourse that is developed in *Le Retour* depends on the intermingling of the two types of image, since it is exactly this dichotomy that establishes the crucial focus on similarity and difference, which emerges as the chief structural force in the film. As I mentioned earlier, the very first image (**Still 1**) is striking in its ambiguity. We are given no clear visual clues and it is virtually impossible to even make the distinction between abstraction and figuration. Once or twice, tiny circular dots seem to emerge from the formless mass, the first suggestion of figuration. With the appearance of the second image, however, there is little question as to the nature of the object being represented. Uncertainty gives way to certainty, confusion to confirmation and

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[56] Ibid, p. 23.
[57] Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918," p. 7.

multiplicity to singularity. So even before considering the relationship between differently produced images, it is clear that, right from the beginning of the film, contrast exists within the camera-less sections. Thus, the first oscillations between the figural and the formless created by the salt and pepper grains become more pronounced when contrasted with the unmistakable contours of a drawing pin. But it is exactly this contrast that creates structure and provides the film with its formal and thematic fluidity. Geometric specificity creates another layer of contrast when the single drawing pin is joined by a handful of nails (**Still 2**), the circularity of the former being contrasted with the linearity of the latter. Is it by chance that they fleetingly occupy the same space? Their momentary appearance together allows the juxtaposition to take place not only between the frame divisions provided through projection but also within them, strengthening the visual and cognitive effect. Yet another element of contrast can be detected at the level of movement; the subtle movement of the drawing pin is compared to the frenetic activity of the nails, randomly changing position across the frame.

Tonal relationships also play a key role in establishing these structural fluctuations. The ambiguity of the initial image is heightened by the transformation and non-specificity of various shades of grey, whereas the subsequent image reinforces specificity by presenting a black object against a white background. This is made complex in the image of sequins (**Still 3**), where grey, white and black are all present. However, as I will explain in the following section, it is not only tonal variations themselves that are important here but rather the impression that is created through an encounter between a particular object and the light source. When the drawing pin and nails reappear, they are presented in negative (**Still 5**) reversing tonal relationships and demonstrating that the appearance of an object is ultimately tied to the process involved in its representation. The contrast between positive and negative, black and white is a crucial feature of Man Ray's photographic work and is not restricted to the use of the rayograph technique. For example *Noire et Blanche* (1926) (**Fig. 6**) draws upon the contrast between Kiki's pale face and the deep black of the mask that she holds next to her. This photograph is interesting also in the way in which it establishes a comparable play of similarity and contrast to that found in *Le Retour*. Kiki, with her darkly painted lips, slicked back hair, and closed eyes

Figure 6.

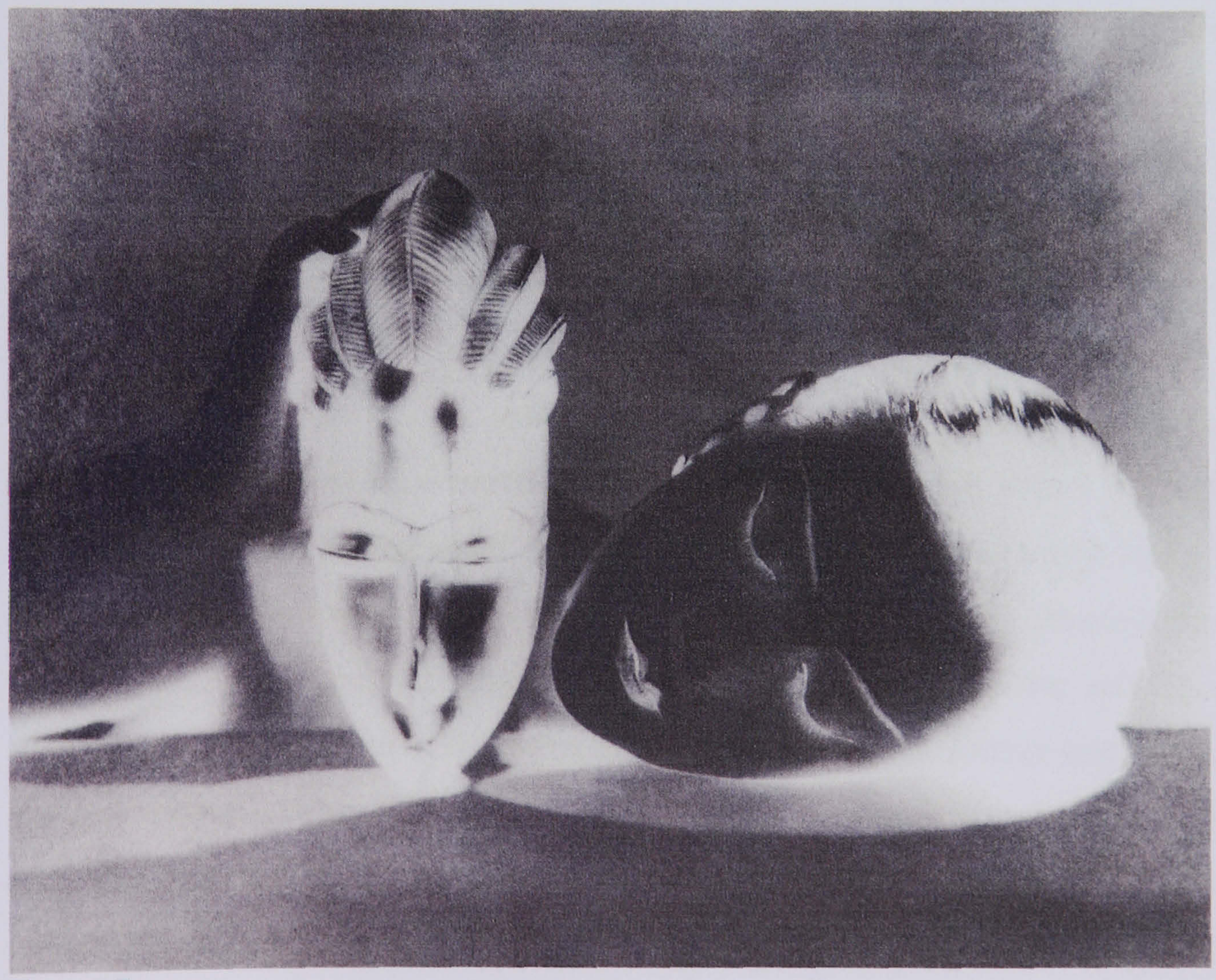

Figure 7.

imitates the inanimateness of the mask, which in turn, by being held upright, contrasts with the horizontal presentation of Kiki's face. It is exactly this delicate exchange of characteristic qualities and the weaving of an intricate web of divergence and convergence that furnishes Man Ray's work with its particular aesthetic appeal. The negative print of the photograph (**Fig. 7**) further corresponds with the positive and negative sections of rayographs and clearly emphasises how Man Ray's formal concerns in this film have a strong basis in his photographic productions.

With the appearance of non-rayograph imagery comes a more complex interplay of similarity and difference, which further attests to Man Ray's interest in the use of light in the process of representation. The first is the image of a light bulb, whilst the second features a montage of fairground rides. Their difference is apparent in the sense that they have been created using a camera and thus provide a counterpoint to the rayographs. However, both sections present an image in isolation from its surroundings, a process made possible by filming an artificial light source against a darkened background (**Still 6**). The light bulb and fairground lights are not important in terms of what they represent, or signify, but in terms of the impression created by them – white forms against black backgrounds. Seen from this perspective, a screen of unidentified shapes, as seen in the sequences of rayographs, becomes comparable to a range of recognisable objects, since form is privileged over content. Through formal transformation and simplification, the image of a light bulb floating across the screen, white against black, in some way resembles the direct impression left by the drawing pin. Therefore, objects that, in everyday life, would rarely be considered in the same terms are allowed to shed their formal and functional differences to achieve a level of convergence. So, whilst the couplings themselves may be incongruous the effect that is created is ultimately one of visual harmony. Considering the relationship between the camera-based images themselves, the singularity of the light bulb can again be compared to the multiplicity of fairground lights, further reflected in the single shot of the former and the multiple shots of the latter. Taking this analysis further still, we could argue that the light bulb and the fairground lights compare and contrast artificial light in opposing surroundings: interior and exterior. The sequence of fairground lights is particularly

significant in the sense that it mirrors the frenetic movement of the previous rayograph images. There is a constant focus on movement but the nature of this movement changes from one shot to the next, just as the separate sections of rayographs all create their own unique impression of kinetic activity. In addition to the filming of different rides moving in opposite directions, there is also the movement of the camera itself. That this montage of activity is immediately followed by the film's most static image, the single shot of *Dancer/Danger*, allows parallels to be drawn at the level of tempo.

The last three sections of *Le Retour* are perhaps the most interesting in terms of formal structure. The visual complexity of the previous sequences of rayographs pushes the viewer towards an increased level of optical awareness. As is the case with the preceding images, the strongest structural link is that of movement. However, it is not simply the presence, but the nature of the movement that is of crucial importance during these sections. It is the only instance in the film where movement is controlled to produce a specific effect, a fact that seriously throws into question Man Ray's claim that these images were produced "without any aesthetic implications." In fact, the aesthetic implications become clear when we consider the relationship that is established from one shot to the next. The paper spiral, echoing the formal characteristics of the spring featured in the rayograph section, winds around itself as it rotates from an unseen source. It is this rotation that leads to both the literal and metaphorical 'unravelling' of the object, the identity of which is, up to a point, obscured by the movement itself. The subsequent shot of the egg-crate divider (**Still 10**) advances the visual complexity by adding another layer of perception – that of a shadow cast onto the blank wall behind it. Again, the object rotates, in the same direction as the paper spiral, left to right, but this time accompanying shadow has the effect of producing the opposite directional movement. The object is duplicated to produce its own antithesis. Yet, this shot goes much further in developing structural contrasts. Here again, we are exposed to the creation of different visual effects as the movement is executed at varying speeds and multiple layers are gradually superimposed one on top of another, making vision complex and bringing the image closer to a kind of abstraction (**Still 11**). Man Ray is clearly experimenting with the way in which perception is modified at a temporal

level, a process that inevitably depends on comparison. The final shots of the film – those of the nude torso – both confirm and conclude the themes of rotation and modulation. The movement, although not attaining a full 360° rotation, mirrors that of the previous two shots, in that the orientation is from left to right and right to left. Here however visual complexity is achieved by using the object itself as a background for the effects of shadow, which creates, as before, a multi-layered composition (**Still 12**). Clearly, the effects achieved in these sequences are intricately related to the objects from which they emerge. In other words, the compositional tension that arises from the shot of the egg divider is a direct result of its geometric specificity. Similarly, it is the subtle contours and controlled movement of the human body that allow shadows from the curtained windows to take on a life of their own, stretching and moulding themselves to the curves of the breasts. This celebration of formal specificity weaves a thread of continuity not only in the final sequence but throughout the film in general. Furthermore, it is precisely through the attention to structure and continuity that Man Ray engages with the more constructive tendencies of Dada.

The body as object

The final images pose a number of questions about the representation of the body, which are also fundamental to Man Ray's work as a photographer, since a large majority of his photographs both aestheticise and transform the female body.[58] Part of Man Ray's appeal for the Surrealists was precisely his exploration and veneration of the female form. The image of the mysterious, sometimes dangerous, often unattainable, woman was a central theme in Surrealist art and literature and indeed becomes the main focus of Man Ray's third film *L'Etoile de mer*. In a discussion of a still photographic image of the last shot of *Le Retour*, entitled *Return to Reason*, Hal Foster refers to the way it represents "the surrealist woman as phallus"[59] Taken out of the context of the film and immobilised as a photograph, the fragmented body becomes a fetish object, facilitating the overcoming of castration anxiety that is

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[58] For accounts of Man Ray's photography in this area see: Jennifer Mundy (ed.). *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001).

[59] Hal Foster, "Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus" In: *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p. 217.

brought on by the threatening image of woman. As Laura Mulvey states in her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema":

> The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, de-mystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object ... or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous ... This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself.[60]

Within the film itself, however, the image seems to give rise to a number of different effects. The fragmentation and placement of the body amongst a series of banal objects, along with the analogy created through movement is an attempt to effectuate an exchange of visual qualities, placing it on the same level as the paper spiral and egg crate.

The torso belongs to Kiki de Montparnasse, Man Ray's lover and subject of many of the images he produced during this period. She also features in *Ballet Mécanique*, made a year later, a detail that has contributed to the ongoing dispute surrounding the authorship of that film.[61] A comparison of the way Kiki is presented in *Le Retour* and *Ballet Mécanique* reveals a number of interesting points about the representation of the body in Dada-related film. Both films involve fragmentation of the body, where a part is wrenched from the whole and thus alters the overall signification. In *Ballet Mécanique* Kiki's face is detached from her body and becomes an androgynous, mechanical form. This is emphasised in the repeated movement of her lips as they break into smile, masked off from the rest of her face. Fragmentation thus becomes a self-conscious process as the face is broken down into smaller parts that are either visible in a section of the frame or hidden behind the masking of the screen. The relationship with Dada is evident here in the refusal of vision, the subversion of bodily unity and the expression of the fragmented self. The most important feature of the film however is the mechanisation of the human form

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[60] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In: *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (5th ed.), eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Coen (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 840.

[61] It is now widely acknowledged that Man Ray played a significant role in the making of *Ballet Mécanique*, as I have already discussed in the introductory chapter.

and the blurring of the distinction between animate and inanimate phenomena. As I have already suggested, Dadaism was characterised to some extent by its attitude towards technology and mechanisation, and one can find, especially within the New York group, numerous examples of the human-machine analogy, which very often centre on association of the machine with the female body.[62] In *Ballet Mécanique* the movement of the human body is not fluid and organic but repetitive and mechanical, an element that is highlighted through juxtaposition with gears and pistons. Kiki's turning head is likened to that of a dummy, her slicked back hair making the visual comparison all the more convincing.[63] The face, traditionally the site of emotional expression, becomes reduced to simple movements stripped of their emotive significance. Even smiling is turned into a mechanical act.

Le Retour, on the other hand, presents a more sexualised fragmented body. Emphasis is placed on the breasts, which occupy the central region of the frame. In the absence of the face, the breasts become the main point of focus and the crucial signifier of femininity. Thus, if *Ballet Mécanique* denies the body, *Le Retour* denies the face, the two films ultimately coming together to present complementary fragments. The fundamental difference between the films lies in the way the body is used within the overall visual structure. Whilst they both employ the analogy of movement to draw associations between the material, the focus of *Le Retour* is significantly more organic than mechanical. The paper spiral and egg crate that precede the final image of the nude torso may represent a kind of repetitive movement, which is imitated by the side-to-side rotation of the body, yet this movement is far from the precise regularity of *Ballet Mécanique*. Rather, variations in the movement of the objects allow a range of visual impressions to be translated to the viewer. As I shall discuss in the following section, this aspect of *Le Retour* facilitates a problematisation of cinematic representation, leading to an impression of visual abstraction. Furthermore, in the sequence of fairground rides, the lights themselves and not the mechanical structures to which they are attached seem to hold

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[62] This is seen particularly in Picabia's paintings such as *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* (1915), Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1912-1923) and Man Ray's own photograph of an eggbeater to which he gave the title *Woman* (1918).
[63] Kiki's appearance in the film and the juxtaposition between her and the dummy can be compared to the photograph *Noire et Blanche* described earlier, in which her androgynous features are brought into a similar exchange with the inanimate African mask. This comparison adds further evidence to Man Ray's influence in the making of *Ballet Mécanique*.

more importance for Man Ray, since it is clearly the movement of these lights in which the camera is interested. A similar concern is demonstrated in the final shot since the patterns of light emphasise the contours of the body, turning it into a site of formal creation. The body therefore becomes a canvas onto which Man Ray paints with light, bringing the two elements into organic fusion.

Notwithstanding the visual structure into which it is placed, the fragmented body nonetheless represents an act of refusal in the sense that it has no identity. Like the masked faces of the actors in *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé*, the headless body of *Le Retour* is denied the power of the look and is therefore objectified through the gaze of the spectator. By removing the possibility of the reciprocal look, the sexualised gaze is made less problematic and challenging. This is also a key concern of *Emak Bakia* in which an opposing process can be identified. Yet, the fragmented torso represents another crucial aspect of the film that is related to representation. By isolating a particular part of the body, Man Ray not only fragments, but also abstracts, the part from the whole. It is from this perspective that the final image is related to the previous sequences, going beyond analogy through movement to link external phenomena on the level of abstract visual qualities.

Approaches to representation

One of the most important aspects of *Le Retour*, particularly in its relationship to Dada, can be found within the realms of cinematic representation. It should be clear by now that the film, rather than presenting a series of random, unrelated sequences, which adhere to the anti-logic of chance and accidental juxtaposition, can equally be seen in terms of an intricately structured piece of work that involves the gradual development of similarity and difference, simplicity and complexity as central creative forces. I have already suggested that formal qualities – i.e., the way in which an image appears on screen – constitute the foundation of such structures. However, it is only by exploring the interaction between abstraction and figuration that the main concerns of the film can be seen to emerge.

Abstraction

A crucial area of Dada, which I would like to explore briefly here in relation to *Le Retour* is the question of abstraction and the artist's relation to external reality. The previous section refers to the influence of International Constructivism in giving shape to one of Dada's artistic impulses, which is particularly important here given its emphasis on abstraction as an artistic principle. One of the key characteristics of International Constructivism is the turn away from figural representation towards the expression of geometric forms with no reference to objective reality, a feature that can be seen in the work of a number of artists associated with both Dada and Constructivism, such as Richter and Arp. However, the subject is a complex one, since abstraction was seen by some as the site of bourgeois modernism and as representing a turn away from questions relating to life. Since Dadaism aimed to reconcile art with life, the artist was required to interact with, question and reinterpret the real materials of life itself. Hence the predominance of photomontage as an artistic practice in Berlin and Duchamp's *readymades*, which he began working with in 1920. Hans Richter perfectly expresses the fundamentally contradictory nature of Dada in relation to reality, abstraction and film in his comment: "After I have stated this fact: Dada = abstract art, I happily wish to insist on the other point: Dada = non-abstract art. And this is also true – if not truer and is documented in a different series of films"[64] Richter refers to a number of films, such as *Entr'acte*, *Ballet Mécanique*, his own *Filmstudie* (1926) and Man Ray's later film, *Emak Bakia*. One has to wonder why *Le Retour* is not mentioned here, since it forms the basis for many of the developments in Man Ray's subsequent work and offers one of the first examples of abstract/non-abstract contradiction at the heart of Dada.

This contradiction is apparent as soon as we attempt to classify or describe the nature of the images contained within the film. *Le Retour* is often discussed in terms of its abstract or 'semi-abstract' qualities, neither of which accurately describes the complex visual permutations that take place within its short duration. Although the film clearly engages with the idea of cinematic abstraction, concrete reality nonetheless remains at the centre of these explorations. It seems that, at the basis of

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[64] Hans Richter, "Dada and the Film." In: *Dada: Monograph of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf (Teufen, Switzerland: Arthur Niggli, 1957), p. 66.

Le Retour is the desire to throw into question the very notions of 'abstract', 'concrete' and 'figurative,' and many of the images, particularly those produced using the rayograph technique, highlight the limitations of such categories and demonstrate the need for a more flexible framework for understanding different modes of visual representation. Man Ray was somewhat resistant to the notion of abstraction and always argued that his art existed in the realms of the concrete. "Je faisais des choses qu'on appelait abstraites," he stated, "et pourtant je n'ai jamais rien pu faire d'abstrait: tout est concret! Dès qu'on utilise des matériaux pour une peinture ou une sculpture, elles deviennent quelque chose de concret!"[65] This paradox is most effectively demonstrated in an abstract sculpture, *Fisherman's Idol*, made in 1926 from pieces of cork found on a beach in Biarritz.[66] Although the sculpture resembles nothing in a figurative sense, it is nonetheless rooted in concrete reality due to the origin of its basic material. Man Ray's very pragmatic personality and attitude towards the relationship between art and life gave rise to a certain tangible presence even in those works that are most removed from physical reality. This is what distinguishes them from the metaphysical complexity of works produced by artists such as Duchamp.[67]

Man Ray's scepticism towards abstraction was equally evident in his approach to cinema. Asked, in a questionnaire published in *Film Art* in 1936, to comment on the future of abstract cinema, Man Ray replied simply: "Abstract cinema has no future."[68] Indeed, the majority of his art, be it in photography, sculpture, painting or film, maintains a strong link with the outside world. The fascination that these works express in relation to the external world derives from their ability to transform themselves into something unfamiliar or to express certain hidden qualities. Yet despite this continued fascination with the objects of everyday reality, it would appear that abstraction, or at least a particular notion of it, was

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[65] Man Ray in Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray*, p. 99.
[66] Man Ray probably constructed the sculpture whilst staying with Arthur Wheeler during the filming of *Emak Bakia*. It features in the same film and is discussed in chapter two.
[67] The difference between the artistic approaches of Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp is rarely explored in detail. The two artists are often seen as expressing similar concerns through more or less the same means. Barbara Rose, for instance, has argued that, "it is impossible to disengage Man Ray's career from Duchamp's." "Kinetic Solutions to Pictorial Problems: The Films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy," p. 69. For an interesting account of the differing ways in which language is used in their work see Robert Pincus-Witten. "Man Ray: the homonymic pun and American vernacular," *Artforum*, April 1975, pp. 54-58.
[68] Man Ray, "Answer to a Questionnaire," *Film Art*, vol. 3 no. 7, 1936, p. 9-10.

indeed central to his artistic practice, determining his unique approach to the relationship between life and art, reality and its representation. Whilst there are very few examples of pure abstraction in Man Ray's work, he seems nonetheless to have been occupied with the search for an alternative mode of representation to that of mimesis, one that would enable reality to speak through the chosen medium, thus simultaneously revealing and reinventing itself. Throughout his art the idea of reality exists not exclusively in the concrete appearance of things, but in the apparently infinite number of visual and conceptual possibilities created by them. It is only through art, he demonstrates, that these possibilities can be discovered. "[J]e n'aime pas les choses qui sont une imitation" he states. "J'aime la réalité pure et simple. Ou alors, j'aime ce qu'on ne trouve pas dans la vie. Mais ça, c'est difficile à trouver."[69] Thus, his separation of the traditionally synonymous concepts of life and reality provides us with an invaluable starting point from which to consider the unique quality of his cinematic works. It can be assumed from this statement that Man Ray considers 'reality' in terms of something that is sought out, discovered or unveiled. A comment by the critic Georg Lukacs, on the nature of cinematic representation, demonstrates a similar approach. "The images of cinema," argues Lukacs, "possess a life of a completely different kind; in one word, they become – fantastic. But the fantastic is not the opposite to living, it is another aspect of life."[70] This is precisely what is expressed throughout *Le Retour* – another dimension to our experience of the world around us.

This is achieved by bringing objects into play with their abstract visual qualities. In a way similar to that with which the film approaches chance – balancing disorder with order – and visual structure – playing one element against another to create harmony and contrast – this aspect of de-familiarisation is characterised by duality, since abstraction and figuration are almost always simultaneously present. Dusinberre relates this aspect of the film to the formal tendencies of painting and sculpture in the 1910s and 20s, where the tension between the two poles of representation can be seen as a central concern.[71] This, crucially, opens up the

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[69] Man Ray in Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray*, p. 70.
[70] Georg Lukacs, quoted in Elasaesser, "Dada/Cinema?," p. 21.
[71] Deke Dusinberre, "Sens et non-sens." In: Bouhours and De Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, p. 32.

perspective beyond the confines of Dada expression and relates the formal characteristics of the film to more general aesthetic tendencies in modern art. Man Ray's early painting displays distinctly Cubist traits and in 1916 he wrote a pamphlet entitled *A Primer of the New Art of Two Dimensions*, in which he developed a theory that brought together the different arts of painting, sculpture, music, architecture, literature and dance based on their potential to be expressed on a flat surface.[72] Francis Naumann has noted that this formalist program with which Man Ray was then occupied determined to a large extent the subject matter of his works.[73] Interestingly, although the pamphlet does not mention the medium of film, *Le Retour* clearly draws on this idea of two-dimensionality. Thus, by using salt and pepper as material, the film begins with a resolutely flat image that draws attention to the actual screen space rather than the 'imaginary' screen space, in which depth is perceived but does not exist. Steven Kovacs has referred to this aspect of the film in the way it, "negates the representative nature of the movies."[74] I would argue that, whilst this process admittedly prevents the perception of depth that is so common to the cinematic experience, it also opens up the spectrum of representative possibilities, *allowing* vision rather than denying it. *Le Retour* introduces a kind of 'cinema of the banal' but goes beyond other avant-garde films of the period, which simply represent everyday objects, by transforming the very nature of representation to suit the material.

Thus, Man Ray uses the rayograph process to make everyday phenomena visible, yet at the same time the absence of depth seems to render it abstract. Unlike conventional photography, where the image is a simulacrum of reality, rayography provides a physical imprint or trace of that reality, which appears in a reduced form. In other words, it presents us with the ultimate representational-abstraction, an image that is at once both abstract and figurative, yet which does not seem to fit into either category. Jean Sachet argues: "Il y a aucune abstraction dans les rayographies de

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[72] This privately published 'manifesto' can be seen in terms of an attempt to create a synthesis between the arts based on the principles of painting. Neil Baldwin has argued that it also represents "Man Ray's defense of his experiments with a variety of artistic modes." Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), p. 56. The pamphlet is reproduced in Francis Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Work of Man Ray* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 147.

[73] Francis Naumann, p. 148.

[74] Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980), p. 78.

Man Ray: on reconnaît presque toujours l'objet qui a servi à l'impression [...] Les rayographies sont des nus d'objets, les premiers dans l'histoire de la photographie, et peut être dans l'histoire de l'art."[75] But it is the ambiguity that characterises these images that comes close to what is commonly understood as abstraction and Man Ray clearly aims to heighten this sensation whilst remaining within the realms of reality. The white circular forms that feature in one short section of the film, for example, could be identified as decorative sequins, but stripped to a basic outline and greatly magnified, their appearance on the screen bears little resemblance to our experience of them in daily life. Any decorative connotations they may have are reduced to denotative simplicity. In this sense, the rayographs are the perfect example of what Lukacs refers to as the 'fantastic' element of the cinema's representation of external reality.

In a discussion of *Le Retour*'s representational qualities, Malcolm Le Grice refers to the "separation of visual qualities from their object of reference." He states: "In Man Ray's film, close-up shots of a torso and paper rolls are filmed in such a way as to maintain an ambiguity about their object nature and identity."[76] In a similar vein, Steven Kovacs observes: "Man Ray plays everyday objects against the abstraction which he can evoke from them."[77] In both cases, abstraction is discussed as something disconnected from the objects themselves, with Le Grice using the term 'separation' and Kovacs referring to the opposition between the object and the abstraction that emerges from it. The assumption is clearly that an object is figurative before it is abstract. However, it is possible to reverse this logic, to suggest that abstraction exists as a basic characteristic of material phenomena, which can be sought out through the creative process. In order to arrive at such a perception, the artist must empty the object of its conventional signification. It is here that we find the most useful link between abstraction and Dada. "Anti-art withdraws from things and materials their utility," states Berlin Dadaist, Raoul Hausmann, "but also their concrete and civil meaning; it reverses classical values and makes them half-abstract. However, this process was only partially understood and only by some of the

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[75] Jean Sachet, "Rayographies." In: *Man Ray*, ed. Sarane Alexandrian (Paris: Editions Fillipachi, 1973), p. 26.
[76] Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1977), p. 34.
[77] Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*, p. 122.

Dadaists."[78] As different as Man Ray's work may have been from those associated with Berlin Dada, such as Hausmann, Hoch and Grosz, his work appears to achieve the kinds of effects referred to here. The presence in *Le Retour*, of *Danger/Dancer* (1920), an aerograph on glass depicting various impossibly interconnecting wheels and cogs, is interesting in this respect since it seems to relate particularly to the notion of the 'half-abstract' object. Hausmann's formulation can be seen in a number of Man Ray's most famous works of the period, notably *Cadeau* (1921) (**Fig. 8**) and *Indestructible Object* (1922-3) (**Fig. 9**), where the traditional function is subverted by giving the object a different form.

Suspensions in time and space

Whilst Hausmann's notion of the 'half abstract' Dada object seems pertinent to the oscillation between abstraction and figuration found in *Le Retour*, its content is more concerned with the visual, rather than the social implications of this process. One of the main strategies that lead to this oscillation between one mode of representation and another is the use of what Man Ray calls 'mobiles'. This involves filming suspended objects in such a way that they appear to simply float and rotate in space, with no visible anchorage to the real world. Although only two images involve actual suspension – those of the paper spiral and the egg divider – many other sections of the film are characterised by their impression of suspension. The nude torso discussed above is compared with these suspended objects, not only in the movement of the body but also in its fragmented suspension within the screen space. Through camera framing, it is 'cut' at both the top and the bottom, the dismembered torso floating in an imaginary space. Interestingly, Man Ray's next film *Emak Bakia*, seems to offer *Le Retour's* torso its missing parts by focusing predominantly on faces and legs.

The sequence of fairground lights represents one of the best examples of the way suspended motion formulates a metaphorical suspension between abstraction and figuration, since the viewer is only able to clearly perceive the lights of the various rides and locations against the black background of the night. They are in a sense 'abstracted' from their source and although we are aware that the lights do not

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[78] Raoul Haussman, quoted in Elasaesser, "Dada/Cinema?," p. 23.

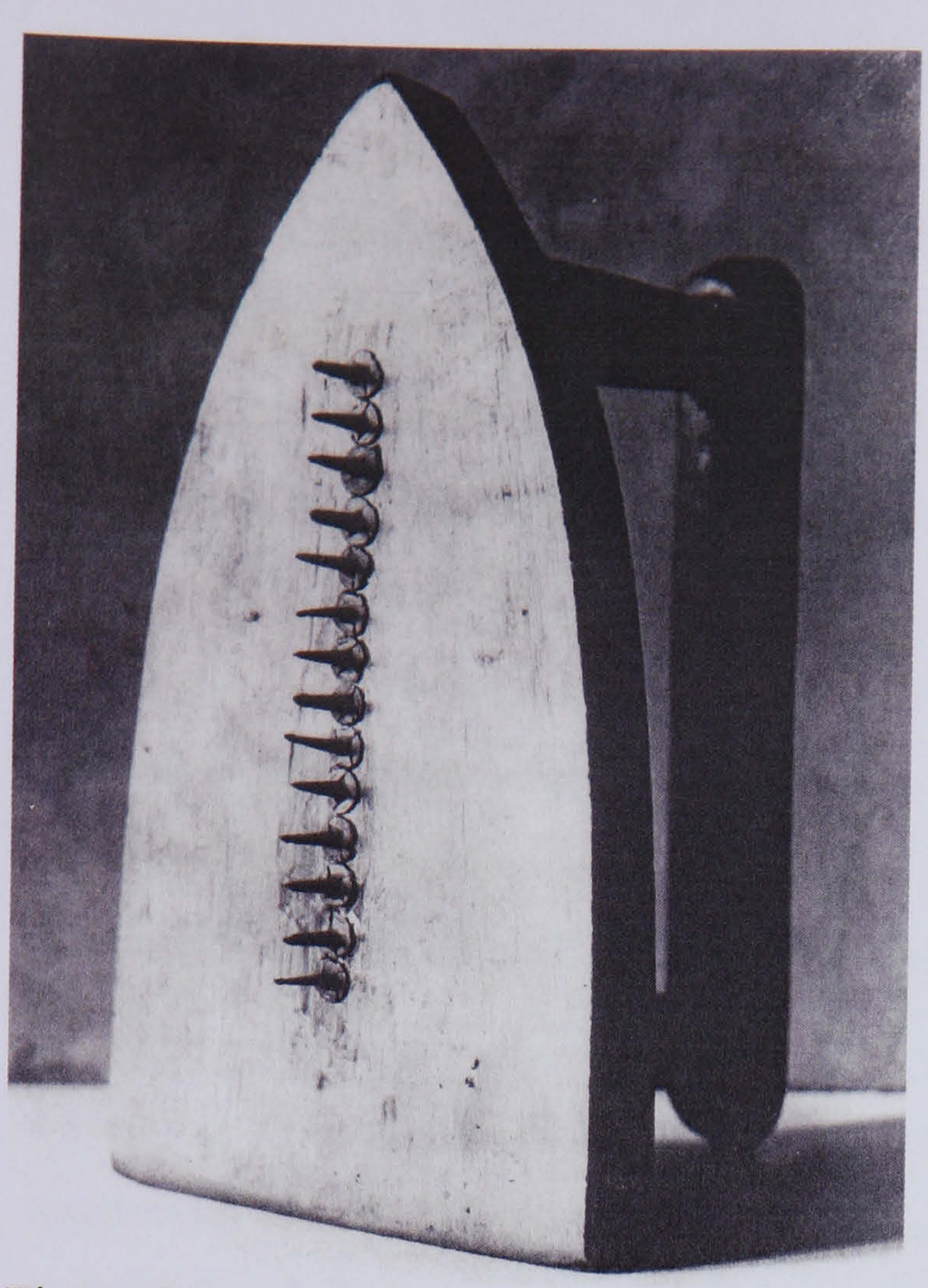

Figure 8.

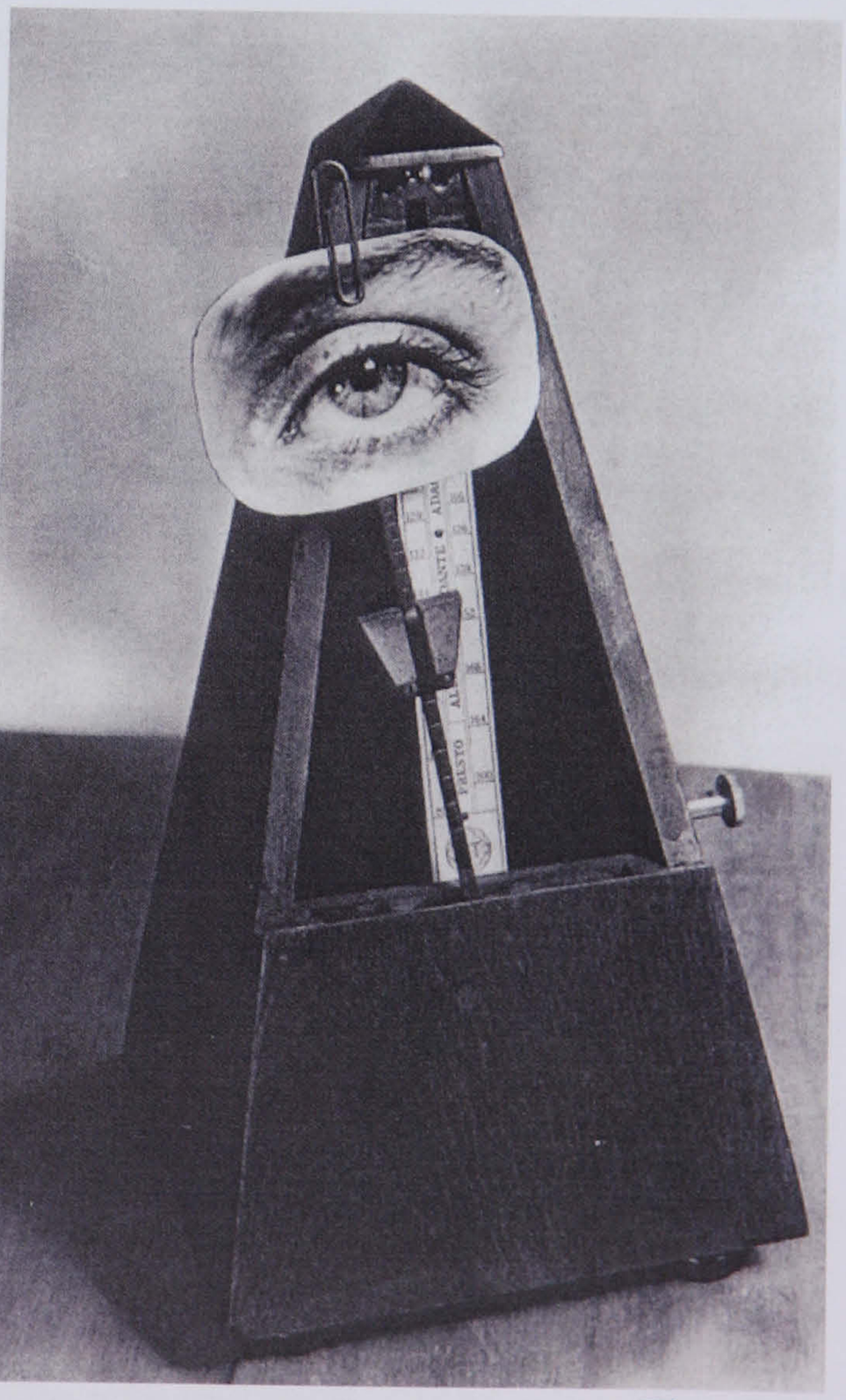

Figure 9.

literally float in the night sky, they are nonetheless separated, as Kovacs puts it, from their object of reference and are suspended against an indeterminate background. It is this suspension that allows a comparison to be made between these images and those of the rayographs that precede them. As I have already mentioned, these sections of the film, produced by working directly on the filmstrip, create a ghostly presence of the objects to which they refer. The rayograph process provides a perfect example of suspension since the images are literally suspended between presence and absence. The black background is the ultimate representation of nothingness, whilst the white imprint of the image delineates only where the object *was*. Thus physical suspension (of the object against a black background) gives way to temporal suspension and/or conflation in which present and past lose their specific meaning.

Le Retour looks forward to Man Ray's subsequent films in a number of ways. The most evident is in the approach to space and depth, which will become major themes in both *Emak Bakia* and *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé*. The majority of images in *Le Retour* reduce cinematic space and enhance the sense of two-dimensionality. Even in the final image, where the curves of the body are emphasised by patterns of light from a window, the body itself is flattened and our interest is focused on the effects that stretch across it. In the shot of the spinning egg crate the impression of depth is problematised through layered superimpositions of the same object. The reference to writing also precludes later concerns, particularly those found in the final two films. The presence of the abstract poem set in motion effectively demonstrates the interaction between text and the moving image, specifically in relation to problems of signification. Although this image can be understood in terms of Dadaist negation, refusing the transmission of meaning, it also focuses attention on the privileging of form over content that seems to be at the heart of *Le Retour*. The physical act of writing on the actual film negative reflects a similar process to that of the rayographs, with the artist forging a more direct relationship with his material and emphasising its concrete nature in opposition to the illusory nature of cinematic representations.[79] These strategies, even whilst they foreground tactility

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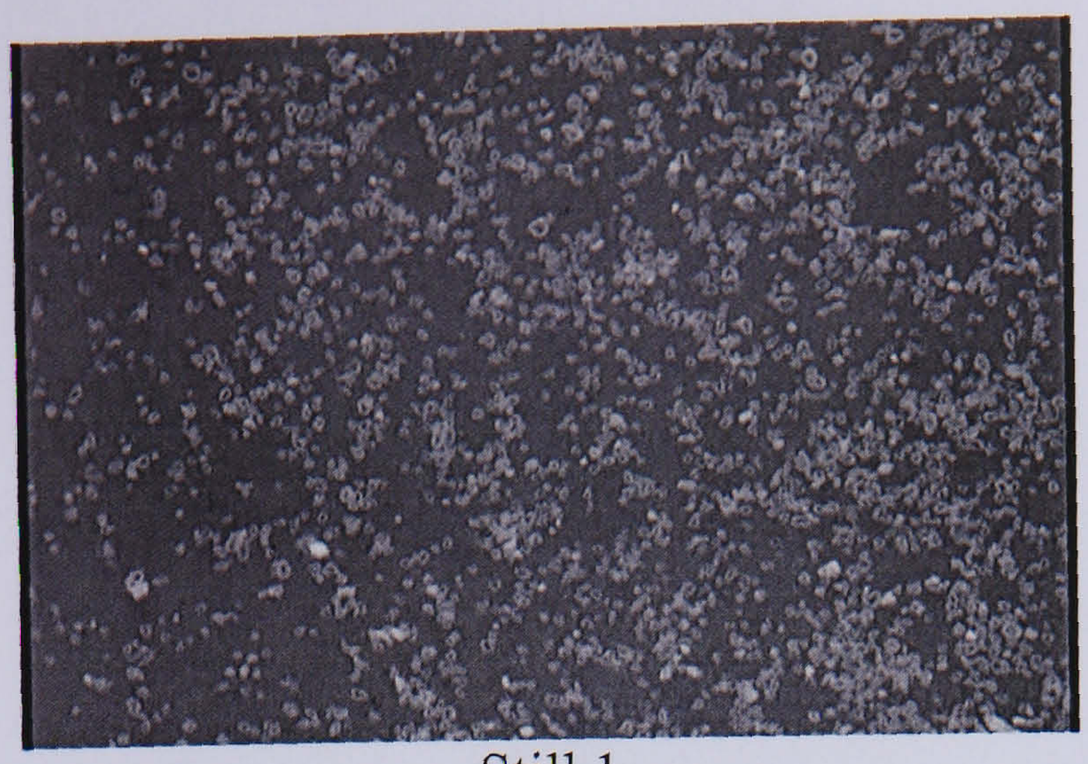
[79] This point is further emphasised by the fact that the writing in one part of the film is actually Man Ray's own name. This will become important in later films where processes of self-reflexivity become much more pronounced.

and tangibility, nonetheless give rise to a paradoxical effect in which presence is played against absence and the images refer less to themselves than to the process that was used to create them. That is, the projected text refers only to the *act* of writing on the film since the speed of projection renders the text incomprehensible and the inability to transmit meaning becomes its central characteristic. The signification processes of writing are also evident in the 'Danger/Dancer' composition that appears in *Le Retour*, where formal transformation becomes an integral part of the reading process and double signification is neatly incorporated into the film's concentration on duality.

The following chapters explore the ways in which *Le Retour* provided the foundations for Man Ray's development as a filmmaker and demonstrate how much of his subsequent cinematic expression revolves around the concerns of duality, cinematic representation and the creative possibilities of light. These independent concerns seem to culminate in Man Ray's continued interest in the oscillation between abstraction and figuration, the single most important element of *Le Retour*.



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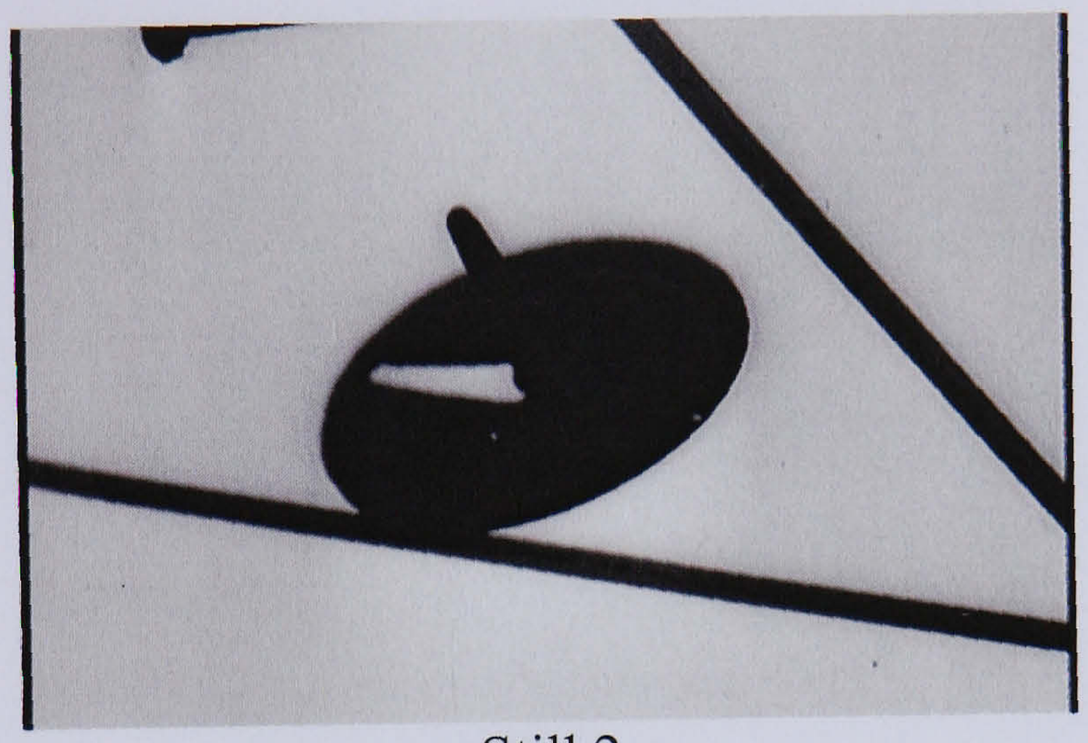

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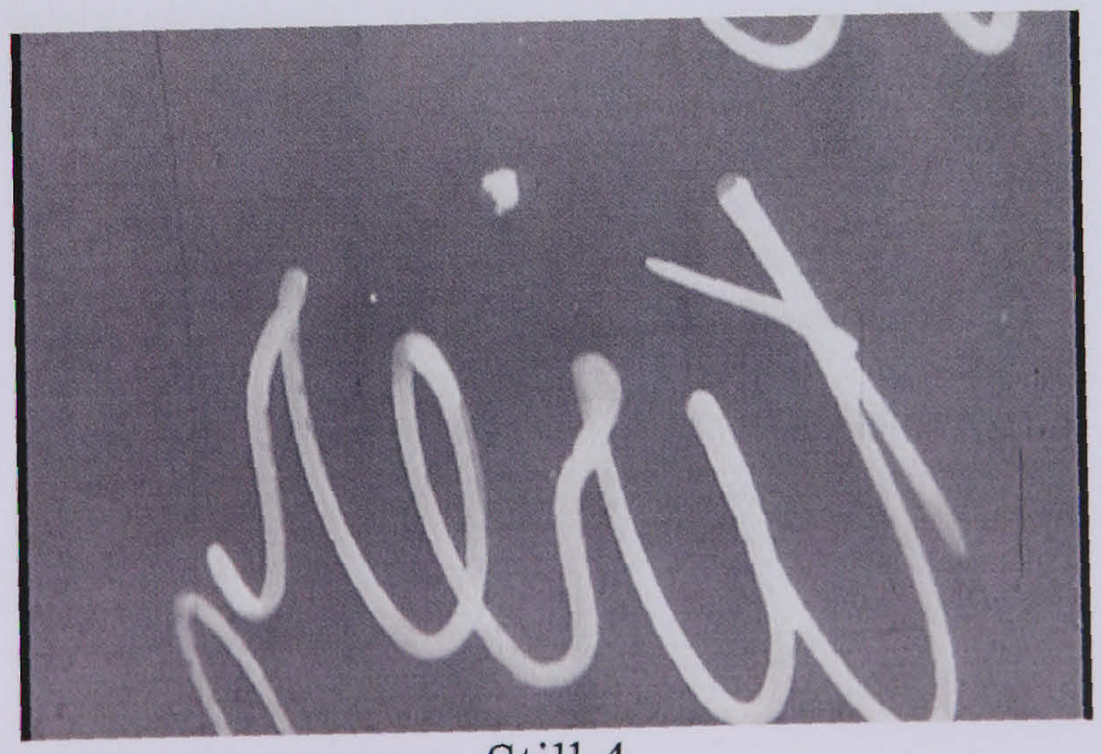

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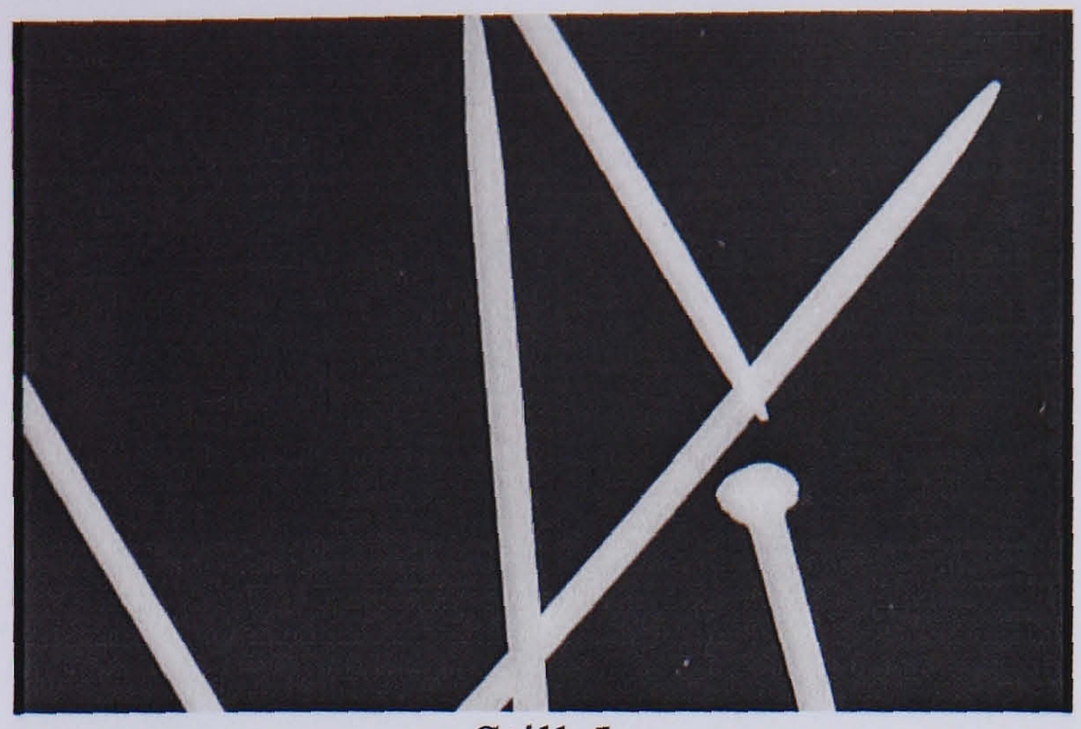

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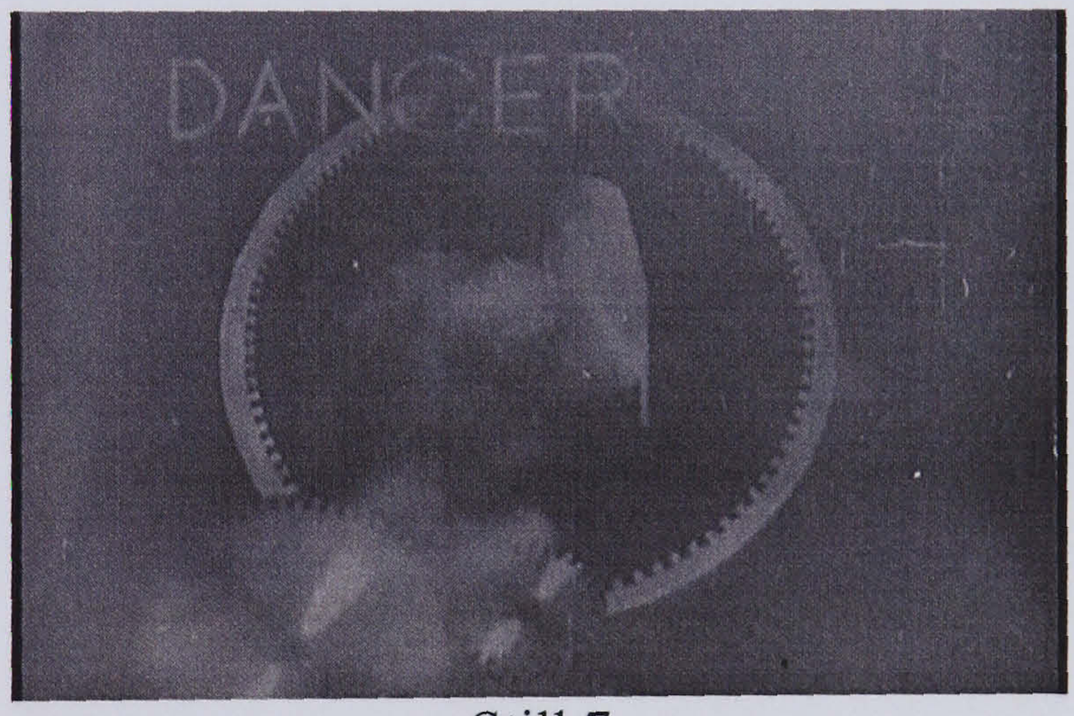

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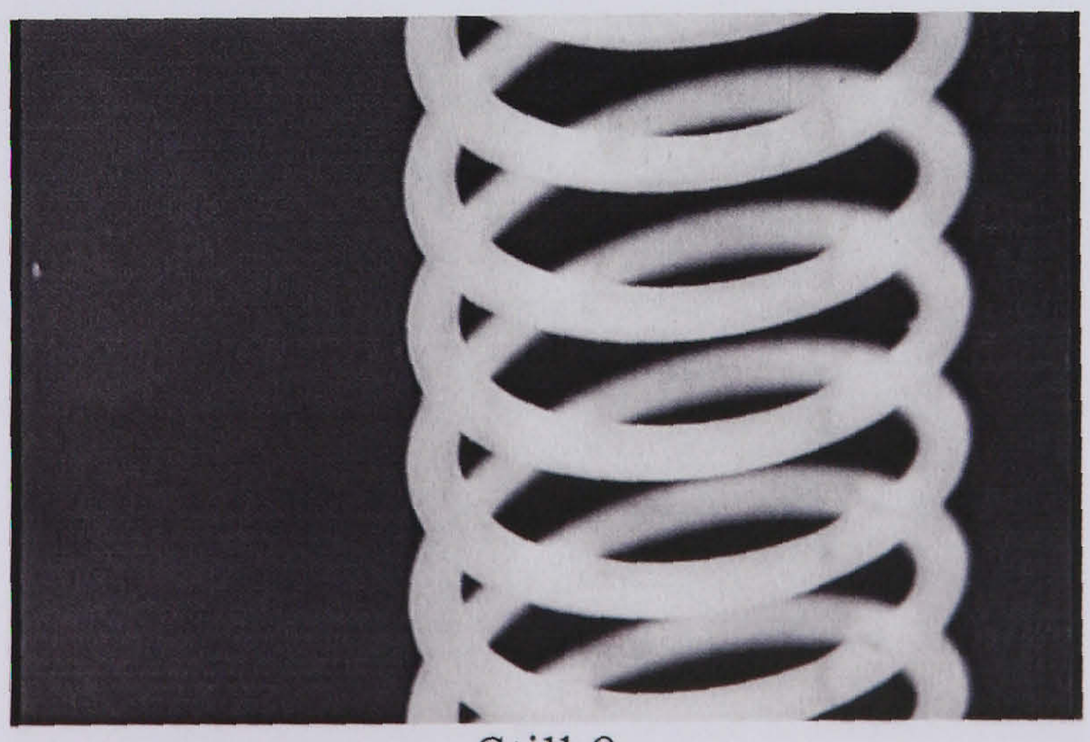

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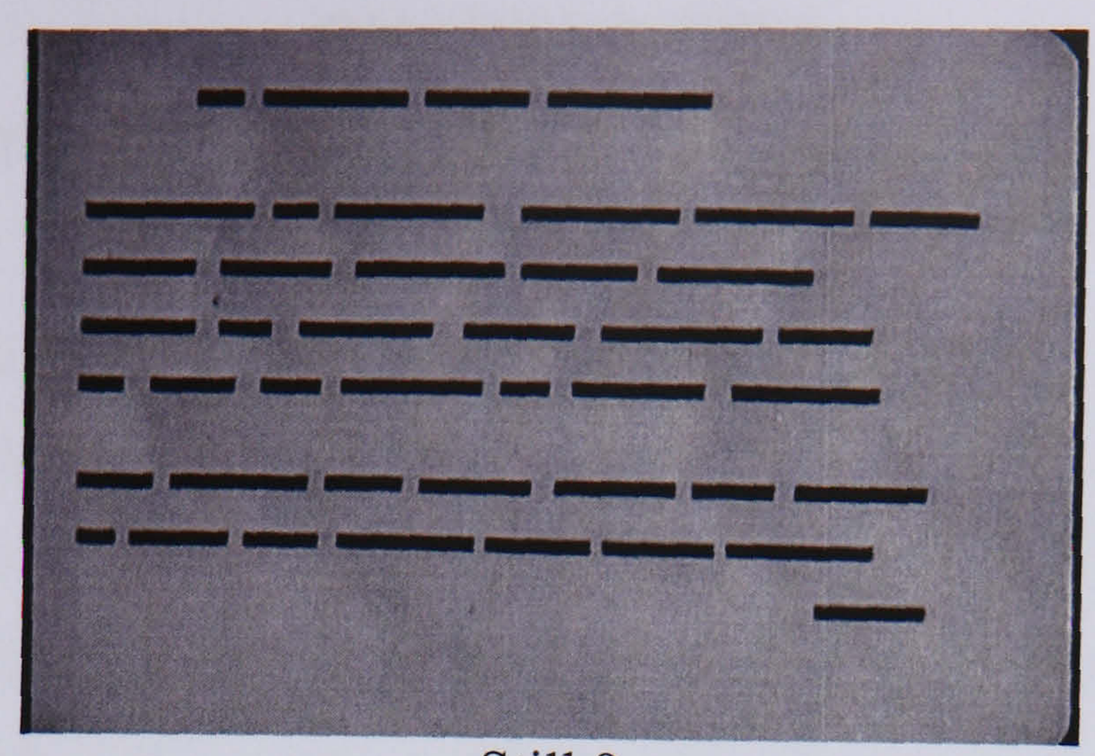

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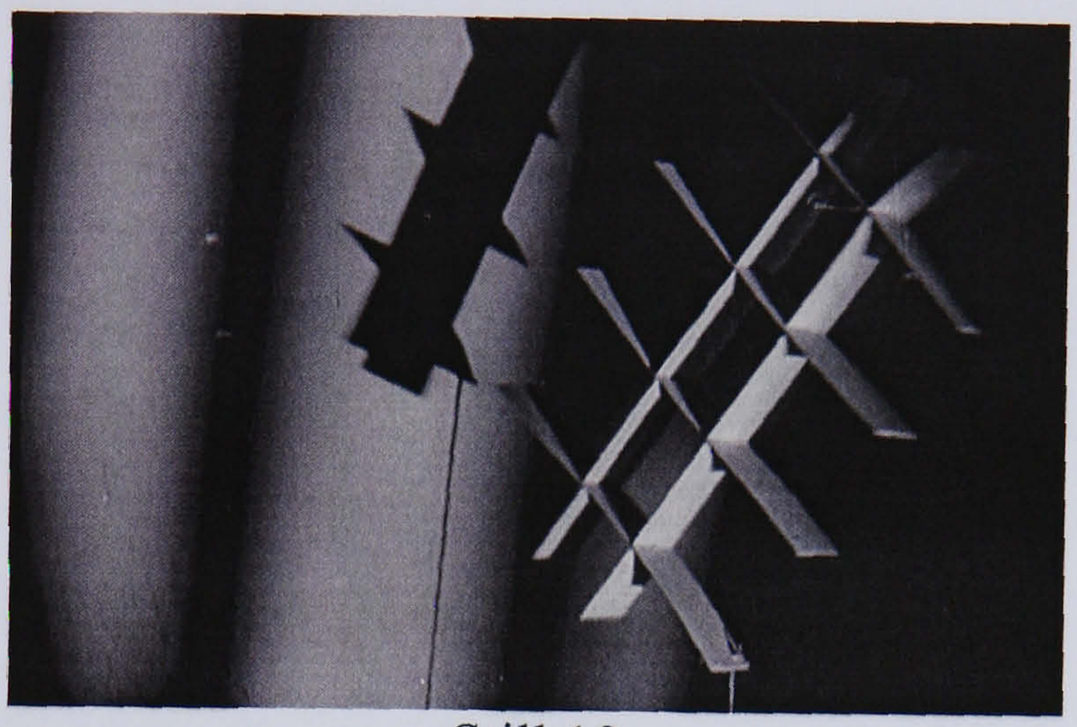

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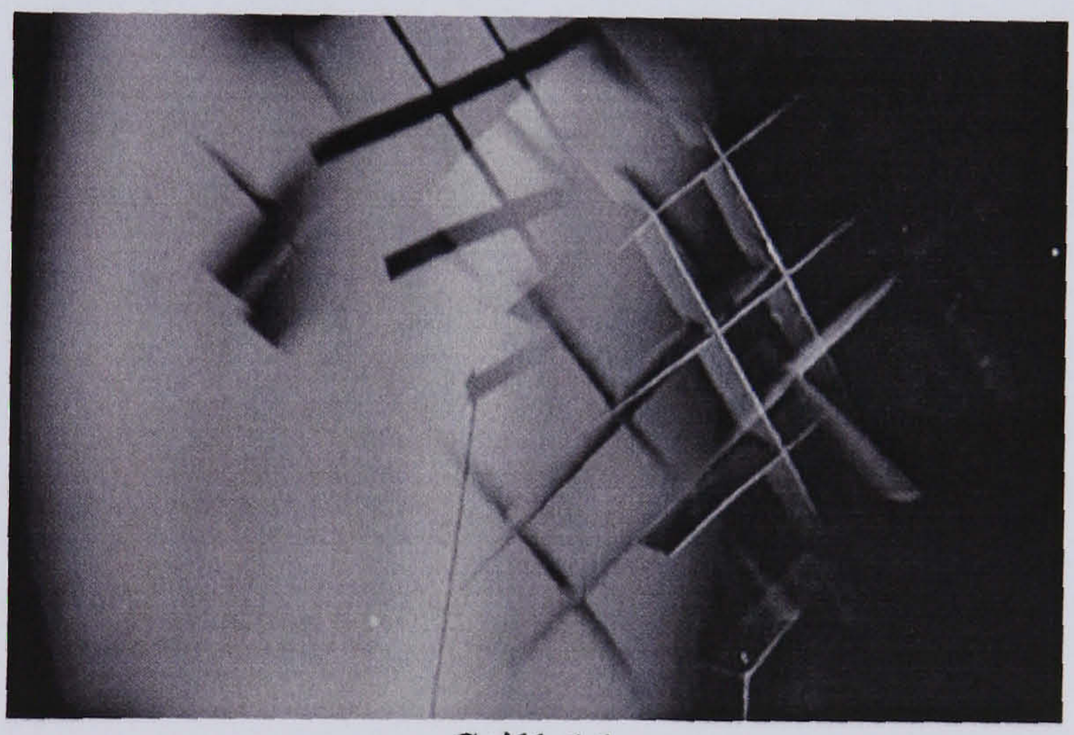

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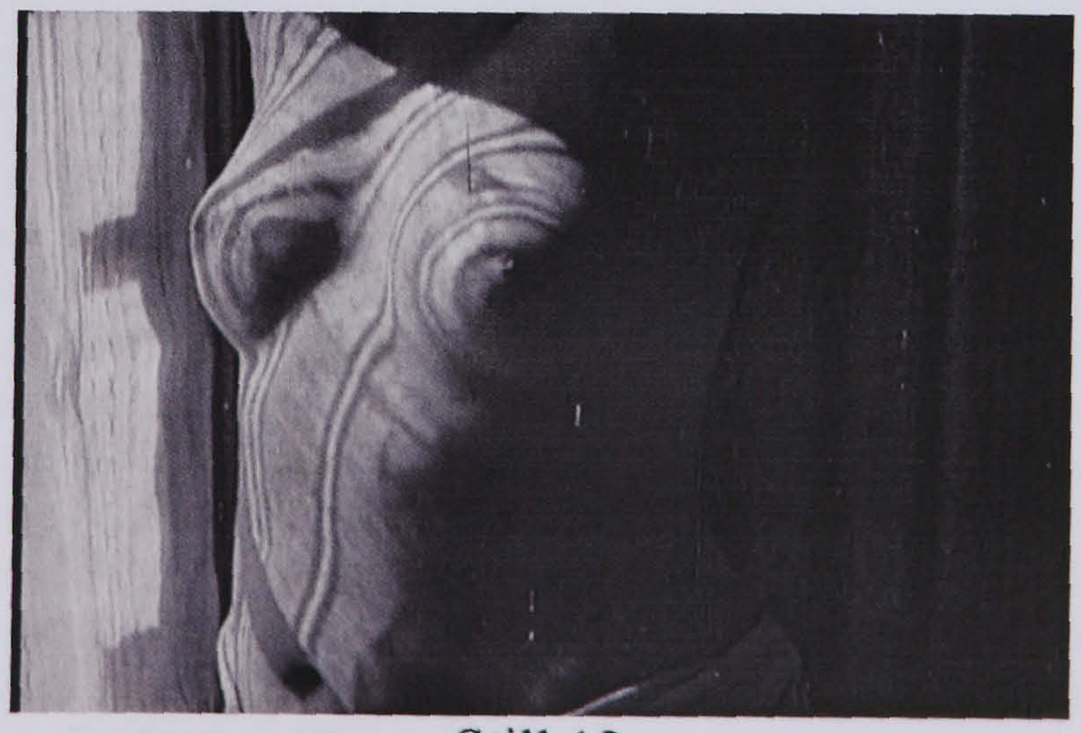

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CHAPTER TWO

The light and the lens: *Emak Bakia* (1926)

Man Ray's second film, *Emak Bakia*, is possibly his most established cinematic work, the one in which he engages most extensively with the formal properties of the image in motion. Indeed, as with *Le Retour à la raison*, the exploration of different forms of cinematic movement is present throughout. Yet although the two films share many similarities, it is evident that Man Ray's formal interests are taken much further in *Emak Bakia*, demonstrating a wide range of concerns that each offer a new perspective on the nature of cinematic expression. It arose out of a commission by American patron of the arts, Arthur Wheeler, who was eager to become involved in the burgeoning art world and saw the medium of film as an interesting field for the development of creative ideas. Not only did he give Man Ray a considerable amount of money for the project but he also left him with complete artistic freedom to create whatever kind of film he wanted. As Man Ray tells us, Wheeler was fully prepared to take the risk of losing money, since he would at least be assured that it had gone to a worthwhile cause.[1] As it happens, the finished film was relatively successful, premiering at the Vieux Colombier in Paris on the 23 November 1926 and showing in London, New York and Brussels early the following year.[2] The conditions were ripe for its reception. *Le Retour à la raison* had already demonstrated Man Ray's talents as a filmmaker and a new kind of avant-garde film had begun to establish itself through films such as *Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1924), *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, Man Ray, 1924), *Anémic Cinéma* (Marcel Duchamp, 1926).[3]

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[1] Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1998), p. 219.

[2] Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas (eds.), *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies* (Paris: Editons du Centre Pompidou, 1997), p. 41.

[3] As I have mentioned in the introduction, Man Ray was involved to some extent in virtually all of these films, making him perhaps the most important figure in French avant-garde filmmaking of this period. This perspective challenges the notion, held by a number of critics and expressed to a certain extent by Man Ray himself, that he was never particularly interested in the medium of film. For instance J. H. Matthews argues that "Man Ray's experiments with film were never intended to do anything more than express dissatisfaction with the cinema as an art form and curiosity to see how difficult it might be to resist the influence of art on movies." *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971). Barbara Rose has also stated that "Man Ray was not interested in film as independent art." "Kinetic Solutions to Pictorial Problems: The Films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy," *Artforum*, September 1991, p. 71.

Although three years had passed since the making of *Le Retour à la raison*, Man Ray had continued his involvement with cinema through a variety of projects. As well as assisting Duchamp with *Anémic cinéma* and acting in one of the scenes in *Entr'acte*, he also carried out some of the filming for *Ballet Mécanique*, a project he eventually dropped out of for financial reasons. His approach to the cinema had inevitably evolved during this period and *Emak Bakia* perfectly demonstrates this development. The distorting apparatus, such as special lenses, mirrors and crystals, to which Man Ray had been introduced in his collaboration with Dudley Murphy is employed repeatedly in this film, demonstrating the extent to which the involvement in *Ballet Mécanique* influenced his subsequent approach to the cinema. As we have seen, *Le Retour à la raison* focuses on the ways in which the process of representation can be used to transform rather than simply reproduce concrete reality and is the first cinematic manifestation of his understanding of vision as a constantly changing and ultimately subjective phenomenon. *Emak Bakia* further develops this concern by constantly drawing attention to the relationship between the signifier and signified, abstraction and figuration, and subjective and objective vision. With a running time of just under fifteen minutes, this film is significantly more complex than Man Ray's first short work, although it displays the same kind of sequential structure in which images are linked together in order to develop a particular formal idea or problem. The diversity of visual expression and the range of iconography used in the fim make it a difficult work to approach analytically. A preliminary outline of its content is therefore required in order to highlight some of the main visual concerns.

The film begins with the title "Emak Bakia" followed by the subtitle "cinépoème" and "de Man Ray, Paris, 1926" (**Still 13**), both of which swing and rotate freely in the middle of the screen, anticipating the series of optical distortions that are to follow. The first shot features a camera and its operator in profile reflected in a mirror (**Still 14**). The image is manipulated in such a way as to show the lens that should appear on the right hand side of the camera pointing directly towards the viewer, with an upside down eye superimposed directly next to the viewfinder. The visual composition of this image is striking, since it drastically rearranges the correct order of things and clearly draws attention to the themes of distorted vision and the

mechanics of the cinema that create the impression of 'reality'. The eye slowly dissolves to reveal the lens and the shot is immediately replaced by a sequence of rayographs taken from the beginning of *Le Retour à la raison.* A panning shot of a field of daisies momentarily interrupts these images and is then followed by more rayograph sections featuring nails and drawing pins, also from *Le Retour à la raison.* It is at the end of this short section that *Emak Bakia* both continues and departs from Man Ray's first film. Two shots of blurred moving lights against a black background (**Still 15**) create an interesting juxtaposition with the rayographed drawing pins, since their perceived formal similarity as simple white circular and oblong forms transcends any difference that may exist on the level of signification. This echoes the juxtaposition in *Le Retour à la raison* of the same rayographs with the lights of fairground rides (**still 6**), especially since the second shot of this short sequence features the same rotational movement. A comparison can also be made with a photograph from 1924, *Bd Edgar Quinet à minuit* (**Fig. 10**), which, interestingly placed in between the years of the two films, expresses the same formal interest in light patterns separated from their object of reference. Continuing the theme of light (and movement or rotation), the following shot presents a scrolling neon sign across the top of a building, which reads "Au milieu du bassin de Neptune au cours de deux grandes fêtes." Although the text has little immediate significance, focusing attention on its visual significance as an arrangement of lights, it is interesting in the way it represents some of Man Ray's concerns that will become more prominent in subsequent films.[4] As I shall dicuss in the following pages, there are frequent allusions in Man Ray's films to the natural elements of earth, fire, water and air. The "bassin de Neptune" highlights the predominance of water in later sections of the film, but also looks ahead to the swimming pool sequence in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*. Furthermore, the reference to Versailles and the Roi Soleil also reflects the element of decadence and grandeur that Man Ray attempts to transmit in that film through, amongst other details, references to the ancient Greek gods and goddesses.

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[4] Most accounts of the film focus solely on this initial interpretation, ignoring the way the content of the text might express wider themes. See for example, Mimi White, "Two French Dada Films: *Entr'acte* and *Emak Bakia*," *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 13, 1984, p. 43 and Lauren Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman: Man Ray, Dada and Surrealist Film-Maker," *Soutwest Review*, no. 64, Autumn 1979, p. 367.

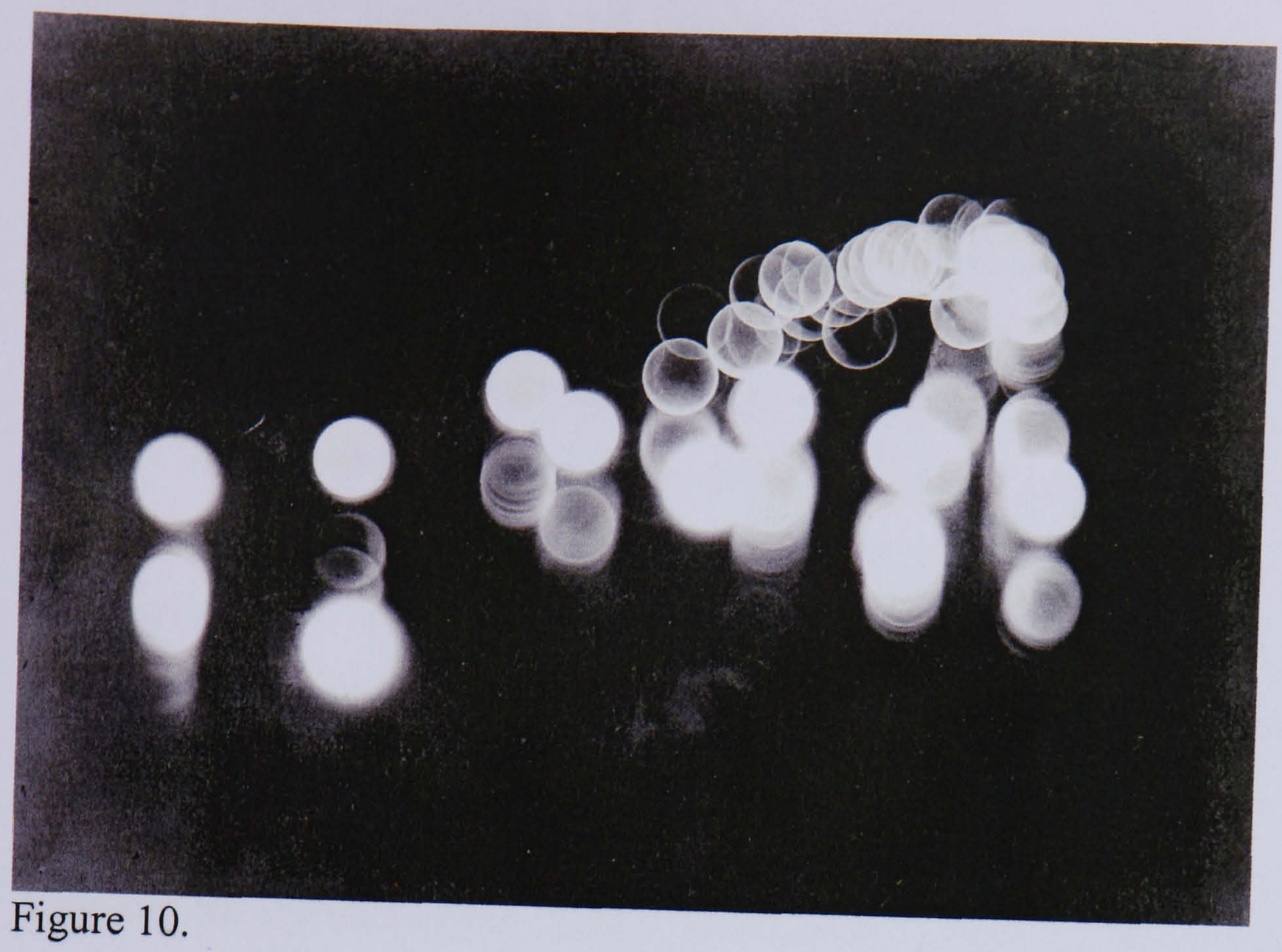

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

The next sequence, of a much more significant length, further develops this interest in light formations and involves a series of semi-abstract images created using a range of distorting lenses, mirrors, glass crystals, reflecting prisms and a rotating turntable. The first shot presents the reflections projected by a rotating glass object, which appear as simple black and white lines moving from one side of the screen to another at varying speeds, an idea that is repeated a few seconds later in a different shot involving thinner and more regular lines (**Still 16**). The next two images are a variation of this idea, using reflective glass objects that give rise to different abstract impressions. The last image of this section introduces a distorting technique which involves bending and morphing the image, creating a series of organic shapes and curves. In this sequence of five shots, Man Ray succeeds in making light the central focus of the image, an achievement that seems to represent the culmination of his experiments in photography up to that point. Indeed, Norman Gambill has argued that this section "is important to the rest of the film and is related to Man Ray's work as a photographer."[5] Although Gambill's discussion does not go into detail on either of these points, it seems clear that the focus is on the creation of abstract forms out of concrete reality and on the physical manipulation of light. Gambill goes on to refer to these images as "Rayographs in motion,"[6] forging an important link with Man Ray's photography and highlighting a process of image creation in which the hand of the artist is strongly felt. Yet, however useful it may be, the term is misleading, since the actual moving rayographs that feature at the beginning of the film are defined by the process used to create them, that is, without the use of a camera and thus any kind of mechanical intervention. The images to which they give rise is often a vastly simplified and sharply defined trace of the object placed on the filmstrip. In contrast, this section of light refractions and distortions draws attention to the mechanical apparatus – the camera and, more specifically, the lens – even if light remains the key creative source. Also, whilst the two types of images lean towards abstraction and describe similar geometric and organic forms, this later section is significantly more determined by a sense of

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[5] Norman Gambill, "The Movies of Man Ray." In: *Man Ray: Photographs and Objects* (Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1980), p. 31.
[6] Ibid, p. 31.

formlessness and flux in comparison with the definite shapes of the moving rayographs.

After this initial alternation between abstract and figurative imagery and the building of comparison between images on the level of formal similarity, the film then develops in a significantly different direction with the introduction of extended figurative sequences that have been described in some accounts as 'narrative fragments.' Here the emphasis seems to move away from a formally dictated structure to a more logical progression of events. This begins with a shot of an eye in close-up, onto which an image of car headlights is superimposed (**Still 17**). A subsequent shot shows a woman at the wheel of a car, the camera moving closer towards her. One of the car wheels is presented in close up then disappears as the car begins its journey, which is then experienced from the subjective viewpoint of the driver. In what can be read clearly as a celebration of speed and movement, the camera records the road and surroundings as they race past, almost too quickly for the eye to register. Speed is important primarily from the perspective of its ability to distort the image and to present an unstable vision of external reality. A herd of sheep pass in the opposite direction, their blurred forms creating a flurry of activity. Suddenly the camera takes up a different position, showing the approaching car from a fixed location on the road, giving the viewer the impression of being physically driven over. The theme of collision is further developed in the few shots that follow in which the shot of a pig is juxtaposed with the chaotic movement of the camera. In this way, objective and subjective shots are combined to physically simulate the collision of elements.

The film then turns its attention to the representation of the female form, particularly legs, beginning with what one assumes to be the driver of the previous sequence stepping out of the car. When the action is repeated and then superimposed so that a multitude of different feet appear simultaneously and leave in different directions (**Still 18**), elements of both humour and formal concern take over from any logical motivation of the shot. It is important to consider these developments in terms of the conventions of narrative cinema. In the discussion of *Le Retour à la raison*, I have argued that the absence of narrative does not necessarily equate to the subversion of those conventions associated with it. *Emak Bakia* on the other hand,

makes a much more self-conscious reference to this absence by presenting certain cues that suggest narrative continuity from one shot or sequence to the next. However, instead of respecting a conventional thematic flow of images, Man Ray subtly alters the rules of cinematic progression by focusing attention on formal relations. The viewer is initially led to assume that the legs getting out of the car are those of the female driver seen in the previous sequence and the two sections are logically linked together. The getting out of the car is an indicator of subsequent action, perhaps the consequences of the collision that has just taken place. The car journey in itself has a very specific traditional narrative function since it represents a forward thrust in time and space, propelling both the characters and the narrative into a new phase of development. Here, however, this convention is turned on itself, since the repetition of the same action creates stasis and impedes narrative development. If narrative continuity is left behind, other concerns take their place since the shot gradually emphasises formal interest through specifically cinematic techniques such as superimposition. Through the duration of this single shot, an impression of reality is transformed into a reality of impressions.

This self-referential concentration on technique leads into the next sequence, which seems to build on a number of elements present in preceding sections. There is, for instance, a clear focus on movement: shots of a pair of legs dancing the Charleston alternate with those of a banjo player (**Stills 19 & 20**). The two separate actions are inter-cut in a total of nine shots, creating a strong impression of simultaneous action whilst at the same time developing a sense of rhythm. As I will discuss further on in this chapter, repetition is a strong feature of *Emak Bakia* and is important here in the relation between different and seemingly unrelated sequences. Whilst the previous shot develops multiplicity and repetition within the frame, the dancer/banjo player section is structured through montage and thus brings together two spatially unrelated actions through both alternation and repetition. Parallels are drawn between the aesthetic and emotive effects of superimposition and montage, with humour being central to the former, whilst an awareness of visual rhythm emerges from the latter. This sequence also continues the concentration on the fragmented body that begins with the feet stepping out of the car. Just as the anonymity of the legs becomes symbolically emphasised through the building sense

of ethereality and multiplicity, the hands of the banjo player and the legs of the dancer are similarly denied the wholeness of representation. Their signification is reduced entirely to form. In this sense, Man Ray takes what would ordinarily function as a transitory shot or a cutaway and turns it into the main focus of attention. The subversive nature of these sections derives exactly from the fact that they signal some form of subsequent development that is withheld, denying the spectator the pleasure of narrative absorption. We do not find out the destination of the dismounting feet or the identity of the banjo player and dancer but are instead forced to reassess our expectations and to reconsider the role and nature of the cinematic image.

The next scene signals a kind of delayed gratification, since it presents a woman, whom we physically identify as the driver of the car in the earlier sequence, walking into a room and sitting down at a dressing table. However, narrative development is once again denied when it becomes clear that this scene does not follow on thematically from previous sections but once again slides into stasis. In a series of shots we see the woman brush her hair, apply lipstick, put on a necklace and finally get up and walk out of the frame. In the next shot we see her approach a window and look outside, a subsequent reaction shot revealing a sea view from the window (**Still 21**). Thematic relations once again give way to formal ones, as the sea itself becomes an object of visual contemplation through a series of shots that show waves rolling onto the shore. The actions of the woman are yet another example of transition, since they show her preparing herself, getting ready for something, the exact nature of which the viewer never gets to find out. However, rather than presenting this particular phase within the context of an accumulation of details, as is normally the case in conventional cinema, Man Ray seems to argue for a different hierarchy of perception that gives precedence to these transitory, seemingly banal moments, normally only considered important in terms of the way they build towards an ultimate narrative crescendo. The liberation of certain images and actions from logical narrative association therefore allows other relationships to be established. These relationships exist not only on a formal level – e.g., the woman's gaze towards the beach motivates the shift of interest to the aesthetic qualities of water, to which we are moved gradually closer in a series of images of rolling waves (**Still 22**) – but

can also be understood from a thematic perspective, in this case an association is established between the woman and the sea. This is reinforced in the following shot of a female body lying on a beach, her face hidden under what seems to be a piece of clothing and that of yet another pair of legs. Another association, woman/sun (suggested by the act of sunbathing), is formed that follows on from the woman/sea theme. The subsequent 360° camera rotation, in which the image is literally tipped upside and sea and sky change places, is extremely symbolic in this context as it points to the co-existence of these natural elements in the female form. Similar associations are also found to a large extent in Man Ray's next film, *L'Etoile de mer*, and as such represent an important link between the two works.

The focus on water and nature is present again in the next section of the film, which completes the sequence of shots that gradually narrow down our field of focus and bring us closer to the water until it literally floods our vision (**Still 23**). Double exposure is also employed to create a multi-layered and multi-textured impression in which the fish, like the feet dismounting the car, interact with their ghost-like doubles. The underwater sensation provides a link between this and the previous shot of the sea and the suggestion of inversion made by the rotation of the camera. After a few moments the image is manipulated through the distorting effect of double exposure, which, in a way similar to the feet dismounting the car, gives the impression that the fish have suddenly multiplied in number. The nautical theme facilitates the film's next transition to a study of various objects in motion, in many ways reminiscent of the final sections of *Le Retour à la raison*. Man Ray's assemblage *The Fisherman's Idol* (1926) (**Still 24**), constructed from pieces of cork found on a beach in Biarritz, is shown rotating at different speeds and is played against the shadows and superimpositions of itself, whilst the next few sections of the film concentrate more specifically on the technique of animation and the bringing to life of inanimate phenomena. The first of these shows a number of variously shaped wooden blocks arranging themselves into different structural compositions in front of an early painting, *A.D MCMXIV* (1914) (**Still 25**). Man Ray's use of this painting as a backdrop for the sequence is not insignificant despite its apparent randomness. Its cubist style, described by Man Ray as "composed of elementary

human forms in alternating blue and red,"[7] reflects the simplistic forms of the animated objects. There is also an interesting exchange of qualities here since the figures of the painting are clearly dehumanised, almost mechanical in appearance whilst the objects, through their seemingly independent movements, take on anthropomorphic qualities. This theme continues into the following brief shot which shows the animated movement of Man Ray's *Homme d'Affaires* (1926), a quasi-scientific drawing that, mimicking the scientist, Etienne-Jules Marey's experiments in chronophotography, examines the various positions involved in a human jump (**Still 26**). Another shot of animated objects follows, this time including a pair of dice and another of Man Ray's constructions – a cello neck with horsehair attached – to which he gave the same title as the film. Like the previous sequence, the objects move and transform themselves randomly in front of the camera.

Although Man Ray uses a transitional device to move from one series of visual explorations to another, there is a clear contrast between the section that begins with the car journey and ends with the swimming fish and that which follows it. The former focuses predominantly on natural elements and a fluidity of movement, whilst the latter is made up of artificial movements of relatively abstract and inanimate objects. Steven Kovacs has noted that these later shots are also characterised by "the clarity with which their material is depicted," providing a counterpoint to previous sections of the film which contain an overriding sense of flux and visual ambiguity. He states: "The way they differ from the two previous fragments is that they are all nonhuman geometric forms whose movement is for the most part jerky and mechanical. Together, they act to stop the fluid continuity of what has gone before and thus serve as a temporal lull in the middle of the film. Their role is the polar opposite of that of the Charleston sequence, for while the dancing legs and banjo highlighted the musical tempo of the film, the jerky movement of sharply defined geometric objects breaks up the musical tempo by an insistence on a staccato rhythm."[8] This presence of polar opposites relates specifically to Man Ray's sense of dialectical structure and as such represents a key stage of development from *Le Retour à la raison*. An awareness of one aspect of

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[7] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 49.
[8] Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980), p. 127-8.

visual representation is heightened by the presentation of its opposite. In this sense, the contrasts in *Emak Bakia* can be considered not as a means to shock and frustrate the audience with its refusal of consistency, but rather as an exercise in developing purely formal relationships.

Another change of direction is marked by the return of the scrolling text, "Avec Marcel Doret", "Le Journal annonce," which is followed by a return to the abstract light distortions, reflections and superimpositions. A woman's face appears and smiles at the camera, then another shot presents a flower onto which a different face is gradually superimposed (**Still 27**). These two shots again represent an interest in the female form as an object of aesthetic beauty, particularly in the association of the image of a woman's face with that of an especially voluptuous flower. There is a clear reference to sexuality here: the passive sexuality of the flower is juxtaposed with the similarly passive position of the woman who, no doubt under the instructions of Man Ray, simply stares into the camera, subtly mouthing a few words. This latter detail is in itself not without significance, since the fact that we see her speak but do not know what exactly she has said emphasises a kind of enforced or contradictory silence. At the same time, this gesture can be read as a form of protest, of a woman that refuses to be turned into a simple image of aesthetic beauty and breaks the illusion by stressing her personality and individuality through speech. The ambiguity surrounding the way in which the act of speaking affects the reading of the image and the dual presence of two opposing interpretations again serves to demonstrate the importance of duality that is one of the film's central motifs.

After these figurative moments, more distortions and superimpositions appear as specks of light that rotate and rush past the camera lens. An inter-title, the first and only one in the film, introduces the final sequence, stating, "La raison pour cette extravagance." In his autobiography, Man Ray points out that this textual piece of information "was to reassure the spectator, like the title of my first Dada film: to let him think there would be an explanation of the previous disconnected images."[9] Indeed, it is this aspect of the film that is most often discussed in terms of its Dadaist rejection of cinematic conventions and the direct provocation of the audience by manipulating their expectations. Man Ray's statement is curious, however, since it

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[9] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 221.

seems unlikely that even the most naïve spectator could possibly envisage any "explanation" of the film up to this point. Another section of his discussion offers a more convincing perspective on the action that follows: "I needed [...] to finish it with some sort of climax, so that the spectators would not think I was being too arty. This was to be a satire on the movies."[10] Man Ray was therefore clearly aware of the tension between aesthetic invention and the desire to provoke, that is at the heart of not only his own work but also the entire Dada movement. After the subtitle, another figurative sequence follows, again involving a car. This time, we see not the beginning of a journey, as in the section featured earlier in the film, but the arrival of a driver at his or her destination. Another instance of a subtly modified repetition can be detected on the level of the driver. Whilst the identity of the woman in the earlier sequence is partially hidden by the mask she wears, the driver in this particular scene is completely unknown. The car pulls up outside a building and a man steps out of the back seat and walks towards it. A strangely disorientating camera angle that shows the man's head from above, which can be read in terms of a de-familiarising device, perhaps a clue to the abstract deformations to which the film will soon return. Once inside the man opens a briefcase, methodically taking out and ripping apart shirt collars, letting them fall onto the floor below. He then rips the collar off his own shirt, and it is at this moment that the film reverts to the purely formal explorations that have been its guiding principle throughout, first exploring the movement of the collars in slow motion as they fall to the floor, then reversing the movement so that they appear to jump up from the floor in an animated gesture that recalls earlier sequences of the film. The sequence ends with the collars seeming to dance independently (**Still 28**) before the film returns to a final section of rotating distortions and light refractions. Interestingly, a number of details in this sequence point to aspects of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's Surrealist film released three years later – *Un Chien andalou* (1929). There is, on a very basic level, the element of repetition, although this is markedly more related to form and technique in *Emak Bakia* than it is in *Un Chien andalou*, the latter focusing more heavily on the repeated motif as a function of unconscious thought. A stronger link can perhaps be made between the two films through their emphasis on the role of clothing. In both

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[10] Ibid, p. 220.

films, formal attire functions as a metaphor for suffocating bourgeois social and moral codes. It is difficult not to relate, as a number of critics have already, the tearing of shirt collars in *Emak Bakia* with a rejection of these bourgeois values and an act of self-emancipation. As the following section demonstrates, the relationship between *Emak Bakia* and *Un Chien andalou* is particularly important to our understanding of the former's position in the context of Dada and Surrealism.

In the final image of *Emak Bakia*, a woman (Kiki) with open eyes raises her head and, revealing the eyes to be painted onto her eyelids, opens her eyes for real. An upside down version of the same image is superimposed onto the original, highlighting the confused sense of perception. A series of repetitions and a trick played on the spectator, yet as we shall see, this ending has been considered in terms of its much deeper implications. Kovács, for example, has stated that in this final sequence of the film, which involves the 'double awakening' of Kiki, "a Dada trick is perpetrated on a Surrealistic motif," that of the "mystery-evoking woman." He goes on to suggest that: "The double ending, which features provocative elements and which in itself is a provocative device, is so well woven into the cinematic fabric that we witness the inextricable fusion of Dada and Surrealist intentions."[11]

Between Dada and Surrealism

Emak Bakia raises some crucial questions about Man Ray's relationship with the Dada and Surrealist movements. If his first film *Le Retour à la raison* is, for the majority of critics, easily assimilated into the discourse of Dada, primarily through its inextricable link with the movement's last soirée for which it was made, this is certainly not the case with this, his second cinematic excursion. The artistic climate had altered dramatically in the three years that separate the two films, as Ian Christie points out:

> Between Man Ray's first film and his second, André Breton emerged from the Paris Dada group with his conception of the Surrealist movement, and many former Dadaists, including Man Ray, followed him into Surrealism. It is at this point that the 'first' Dada cinema gives way to a second, in which

[11] Steven Kovács, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*, p. 132.

> the traditional elements of representation and narrative become the subject of Dada subversion [...][12]

Although the first "Manifeste du Surréalisme" appeared in 1924, it wasn't until much later, in 1929, that the first quintessentially Surrealist film was made, that is to say, one that met with the approval of Breton and his followers. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this film, *Un Chien andalou*, represented a clear break with the exploration of form and materiality in film and returned to the traditional concern with content on the level of story. Certain elements such as narrative and mimetic representation, the rejection of which had characterised many films of the 1920s (particularly those associated with the Dada movement), were now embraced as the principal means of attaining, in cinema, what the Surrealists had achieved in other areas such as painting and literature, that is, the fusion of reality and the imagination through an exploration of the unconscious. Compared with the experiments into movement and rhythm that to a large extent characterise a number of experimental films of the period, such as Henri Chomette's *Jeux des reflets et de la vitesse* (1924) and *Cinq minutes de cinéma pur* (1926), as well as *Ballet Mécanique* and *Entr'acte*, *Un Chien andalou* and the critical acclaim it gained clearly points to a changing sensibility in the realms of avant-garde filmmaking.

It is for this reason that Christie's notion of a second stage of Dada cinema seems particularly interesting since it suggests the presence of a transitional period during which Dada techniques were still being employed but were accompanied by a tendency towards certain filmmaking approaches that could be considered Surrealist, such as the appropriation and subvertion of conventional forms of representation and narrative. Furthermore, that Surrealist concerns and motifs can be found in films whose structure and overall aim seems to have more in common with Dada, as the earlier statement by Kovács about *Emak Bakia* seems to claim, puts forward an idea that there exists a fluidity between the two movements. The question must be asked however, whether an interrelationship between the tendencies of Dada and Surrealism can exist in the same work and if so, what are the implications of such a process? Rudolph Kuenzli creates a very definite divide between the two modes of

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[12] Ian Christie, "French Avant-Garde in the Twenties: From 'Specificity to Surrealism" In: *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975* (London: Arts Council, 1979), p. 42.

expression, arguing that, although Dada and Surrealist films both challenge the conventions of traditional cinema, they do so in radically different ways, relating to their respective artistic aims. "The difference between Dada and Surrealist films," he states, "lies in their different strategies of defamiliarizing social reality. Surrealist filmmakers largely rely on conventional cinematography (narratives, optical realism, characters) as a means to draw the viewer into the reality produced by the film. The incoherent, non-narrative, illogical nature of Dada films, which constantly defamiliarize the familiar world through cinematic manipulation, never let the viewer enter the world of the film."[13] So, if we are to accept this divide, which would automatically involve accepting Dada and Surrealism as occupying separate terrain in the realms of visual art, then the notion of a period of interchange, where the explosion of Surrealism affects Dadaist expression, seems particularly problematic. Furthermore, as Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out, the very fact of associating films made after 1924 with Dadaism, when the revolutionary ideals of the movement had long been declared futile, raises important questions.[14] *Emak Bakia* evokes this difficult critical position, since although it demonstrates certain qualities that relate to Dadaism (particularly those cited by Kuenzli: non-narrative, non-psychological, self-referential, de-familiarization of social reality), it was made precisely during the period when the destructive practices of the Dada movement were being replaced by the more socially constructive aims of Surrealism. The inclusion in *Emak Bakia* of a sequence of images made for *Le Retour à la raison* further complicates matters. But before exploring these issues in detail, it is necessary to outline some of the main principles of the Surrealist movement, the relationship with Dadaism, along with its impact on avant-garde filmmaking.

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[13] Rudolph Kuenzli (ed.), *Dada and Surrealist Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 10.
[14] Elsaesser states that "if one takes a generous view" the chronology of Dada film would include the early films by Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling, *Le Retour à la raison*, *Entr'acte*, *Ballet Mécanique*, *Filmstudie*, *Emak Bakia*, *Anémic Cinéma*, *Ghosts Before Breakfast*, *Two-Penny Magic* and *L'Etoile de mer*. However, he concludes that no chronology of the movement itself stretches that far, suggesting that there is a discrepancy between the films that can be seen to express Dada characteristics and the corresponding historical context. Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph Kuenzli, p. 15.

The emergence of Surrealism

In a book documenting the various stages of the movement, René Passeron argues that Surrealism "was born long before the explosion of Dada in Paris," in the collective literary activities of a number of men who came to know each other through their involvement in the First World War – André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon.[15] Together they established and wrote for the journal *Littérature*, which, in 1919 published one of the earliest examples of Surrealist automatic writing, Breton and Soupault's *Les Champs Magnétiques* (*The Magnetic Fields*).[16] At about the same time, the Dada movement was making an impact and many of the French writers, although hesitant at first, gradually became involved through the powerful influence of Tristan Tzara.[17] However, between 1921 and 1922 artistic and political disagreements amongst key members, along with the general waning of the movement's effect on the public, led to the break up of the Dada movement. Breton, dissatisfied with the destructive, nihilist attitude of Dada envisaged a new system in which creative and intellectual activity would serve a more politically engaged, revolutionary function. The fundamental premise of this new approach was to be the liberation of the mind from rational thought and the fusion of the real and the imaginary.

Breton, previously a student of medicine who spent his military service during the war treating shell-shocked soldiers in a psychiatric hospital, was hugely influenced by his exposure to mental illness and hysteria brought on by the atrocities of the war. His interest in the complexities of the human mind along with the theories of Sigmund Freud led him to assert that the true liberation of man could be achieved by tapping into the unconscious – that aspect of the mind most clearly represented in a dream state – thus giving rise to a deeper, more truthful, form of reality. Borrowing a term first used by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917, Breton called this envisaged reality 'surreality' and in his "Manifeste du Surréalisme" of 1924 he explained its meaning in the following terms:

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[15] René Passeron, *Surrealism* (Paris: Editions Pierre Terrail, 2001), p. 25.
[16] André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs Magnétiques* (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1920).
[17] Hans Richer, *Dada: art and anti art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), p. 167.

SURREALISM, noun, masc., Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

ENCYCL. Philos. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life.[18]

As Waldberg states: "Imagination, folly, dream, surrender to the dark forces of the unconscious and recourse to the marvellous are here opposed, and preferred, to all that arises from necessity, from a logical order, from the reasonable."[19]

Although Surrealism was initially conceived in terms of the literary, it wasn't long before visual interpretations of Breton's principles to began to manifest themselves. The first manifesto had clearly placed emphasis on automatic language but this did not necessarily rule out the idea of an automatic image, since language and vision are inextricably linked, especially within the realms of the dream. The centrality of the image can be seen in the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* published between 1924 and 1929. Man Ray's photographs dominate the first issue and were to be joined in later issues by works of both painters and photographers. Interestingly however, in that first issue, Pierre Naville who was then the editor rejected openly the idea of Surrealism in the visual arts, stating: "Everyone knows that there is no Surrealist painting."[20] Breton, whose views did not correspond with those of Naville, took over editing the journal and some years later published *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, a book that comprised of a series of essays on ten major artists of the time, some of which were not directly related to the movement, such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque.[21] Thus, despite certain apprehensions about the translatability of Surrealism to the plastic arts, the movement developed a strong visual component, extending into the realms of painting, photography, sculpture and, eventually, film.

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[18] Andre Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism." In: *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26.
[19] Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 16.
[20] Quoted in David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 73-4.
[21] André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928). The other artists included in the book are: Giorgio De Chirico, Francis Picabia, Max Ernst, Man Ray. André Masson, Joan Miro, Yves Tanguy and Jean Arp.

Surrealist vision relies on a concrete, recognisable reality that serves as raw material for the irrational juxtapositions and transformations, out of which a new order of things can be seen to emerge. As Linda Williams describes, "The Surrealists' expansion of the poetic image into the realm of the visual arts resulted in the readoption of conventions of figural art abandoned by Cubism. Recognisable objects were once again given a certain existence in space."[22]

Surrealist film

Although, in relation to other visual arts, film was not incorporated into the Surrealist project until relatively late, it nonetheless occupied an important position for a large majority of those involved in the movement. Many of the Surrealists were enthusiasts of film and wrote on various aspects of the medium, giving rise to a characteristically, although not necessarily cohesive, surrealist position on the cinema.[23] Philippe Soupault, Pierre Reverdy, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, Robert Desnos and Antonin Artaud contributed extensively to the theoretical discourse on the cinema during the 1920s, making up, to some extent, for the lack of actual surrealist productions. Their favourite films were not those of the contemporary avant-garde, against which they positioned themselves in rejecting the bourgeois modernism and gratuitous obsession with form, but those of the popular commercial cinema, the *Fantômas* series, for example, slapstick comedy and technologically 'crude' horror films such as *King Kong*.[24] In addition to this body of critical writing, a number of film scripts were written, most of which were never realised. The most prolific in this area were Robert Desnos and Antonin Artaud. There are, therefore, two different notions of Surrealist activity and the cinema: Surrealist spectatorship and Surrealist filmmaking. Rudolph Kuenzli has argued that these two approaches

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[22] Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 12.
[23] J. H. Matthews quotes Georges Sadoul as saying: "However doctrinaire we were, in many areas, we were far from being in agreement when it came to the cinema" and "surrealism did not have, properly speaking, a cinematographic doctrine." *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 11.
[24] For a detailed account of the Surrealists' relation to commercial cinema, see J. H. Matthews, p. 11-50.

are contradictory since the viewing of popular films demanded an active viewer, "whereas truly Surrealist films posited a passive spectator."[25]

The practice of active viewing relates particularly to the behaviour of the spectator in the process of reception and interpretation and is best demonstrated by André Breton's comments about the way he interacted with the commercial cinema. In a much-cited passage of an article entitled 'Comme dans un bois' he states:

> I never began by consulting the amusement pages to find out what film might chance to be the best, nor did I find out the time the film was to begin. I agreed wholeheartedly with Jacques Vaché in appreciating nothing so much as dropping into the cinema when whatever was playing was playing, at any point in the show, and leaving at the first hind of boredom – of surfeit – to rush off to another cinema where we behaved in the same way, and so on [...] I have never known anything more magnetizing [...][26]

It is in relation to this statement by Breton that we can begin to understand Man Ray's own position in the context of Surrealism, since he has also made references to this kind of active participation. He states for example: "Je vais au cinéma sans choisir les programmes, sans même regarder les affiches. Je vais dans les salles qui ont des fauteuils confortables."[27] It is not difficult to see the similarity between the two comments. Both men highlight their delight in bringing an element of spontaneity and surprise into the practice of cinema going. This represents a rebellious attitude in terms of the conventions of cinema exhibition and spectatorship, especially in relation to the role played by advertising and film criticism. Man Ray and Breton refuse to play by the rules dictated by these methods of communicating with film audiences. Crucially, both statements begin by pointing to this act of rejection – Breton's disinterest in what, according to the amusement pages, was currently the best film and Man Ray's ignoring of film posters. Man Ray's comment also seems to suggest that, like Breton, he entered the cinema at any given moment and not at the advertised time at which the film was due to start. There is thus a very clear recognition of cinema as an industry that embodied and reflected

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[25] Rudolph E. Kuenzli in his introduction to *Dada and Surrealist Film*, p. 8.
[26] André Breton, "Comme dans un bois." First published in *L'Age du cinéma*, August-November, 1951. Translated and reprinted as "As in wood." In: *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, Third Edition, ed. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), p. 73.
[27] Man Ray, "Témoignages," in *Surréalisme et cinéma*, special issue of *Etudes Cinématographiques*, nos. 38-39, 1965, p. 45.

the values of a society against which they were fighting and into which they aimed to inject a revolutionary spirit of chance and irrationality. The very act of walking randomly into a cinema has the effect of disturbing the logical, ordered and, often, predictable nature of narrative cinema. It also gives to the spectator a kind of active freedom in constructing their own film, the act of walking in and out of different cinemas mirroring the process of editing.

However, the practices represented by Breton and Man Ray radically diverge in terms of their interaction with the actual film. Man Ray's active viewing employs an element of re-reading and re-interpretation based on the formal properties of the image. The previous statement continues: "J'ai inventé un système de prisme que j'adaptais sur mes lunettes : je voyais ainsi, en couleurs et en images abstraites, des films en noir et blanc qui m'ennuyaient."[28] Through this process, he realigns the focus of attention from that of the story to one of formal interest. Man Ray's indifference to narrative is also evidenced in his comment: "The worst films I've ever seen, the ones that send me to sleep, contain ten or fifteen marvellous minutes. The best films I've ever seen contain ten or fifteen valid ones."[29] He has also stated: "Je pourrais prendre n'importe quel film de deux heures et le réduire à douze minutes au montage, je suis sûr que ça suffirait."[30] In his account of his introductory speech to the audience at the premier screening of *Emak Bakia*, Man Ray tells us: "I concluded in a more conciliatory tone: how many films had they sat through for hours and been bored? My film had one outstanding merit, it lasted not more than fifteen minutes."[31] Another statement, this time by Ado Kyrou, further illustrates that Man Ray's interest lay in the ways in which formal, abstract patterns could be drawn from the cinematic image: "Man Ray has told me that if a film bores him he spontaneously transforms it by blinking his eyes rapidly, by moving his fingers in front of his eyes, making grilles of them, or placing a semitransparent cloth over his face."[32] Placed side-by-side, these two processes of active film viewing carried out by Breton and Man Ray allow some significant observations to be made about the

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[28] Ibid, p. 45
[29] Man Ray, "Cinemage", in Paul Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, p. 133.
[30] Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray* (Paris: Maeght éditeur, 2002), p. 50.
[31] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 222.
[32] Ado Kyrou, "The Film and I." In: *The Shadow and Its Shadow*, ed. Paul Hammond, p. 131.

conflicting approaches to film within the realms of active viewing, hitherto seen as a predominantly Surrealist exercise. This will be useful when discussing the content of *Emak Bakia* and, more generally, Man Ray's work as a filmmaker.

Although the behaviour of both men can be seen to derive from a desire to manipulate, transform and ultimately to exert some kind of control over that which is presented to them on the cinema screen, their respective techniques represent their very different positions in relation to the image, reality and representation. Breton, respecting the form of the work, transforms the 'reality' of the film or films on the level of content, randomly juxtaposing unrelated stories and characters. The idea behind this technique is clearly that of confusing and mingling elements of each film by utilising the capacity of memory to retain particular pieces of narrative information. Conventional film viewing relies heavily on the memory for the piecing together of a gradually building narrative and it is highly likely therefore that Breton, whilst watching one film would confuse it with aspects of the previous one, creating the Surrealist effect of *dépaysement*. This is the creation of a new reality out of various reality fragments. Crucially, this process mirrors Breton's notion of 'convulsive beauty,' which arises from the juxtaposition of two unrelated elements, resulting in the creation of a new meaning and a rethinking/redefinition of the original elements.[33] In contrast, Kyrou's comment about Man Ray's cinema viewing demonstrates that the latter is interested less in the juxtaposition of different realities to form a new perspective unhampered by logic and rationality than in altering the very basis of this reality on a formal level. In manipulating the image he changes the point of focus from content to form, and in doing so, reverses conventional cinema's form-content relationship, which dictates that the images remain subservient to the narrative and are presented in such a way as to sustain the semblance of reality. In both cases, the film is subjected to a radical reformulation. Breton's technique is founded on the disruption of temporal and spatial continuity in order to create the effect of surprise and disorientation but in order for such effects to take place he must allow himself to enter into the reality that is created by each film. Man Ray on the other hand prevents such involvement not only by physically placing objects between him and the cinema screen (eyelids, hands, cloth), but also by refusing the mimetic

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[33] Breton used Lautréamont's phrase "Beautiful as the unexpected meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." See chapter one, p. 48.

status of the image and turning it instead into a site for plastic exploration. Therefore, if Breton uses narrative and photographic realism as the basis of his Surrealist recreation of the film, Man Ray rejects these elements and replaces them with visually abstract impressions and sensations.

Surrealist expression in film relies on mimesis – the basic foundations that Man Ray wishes to disturb in his manipulation and distortion of the image. The cinema was considered a valuable tool for Surrealism precisely because of its ability to create a replica of reality whilst at the same time offering various ways to disturb that reality in ways similar to the dream. Philippe Soupault writes: "For us the cinema was an extraordinary discovery, and it coincided with the earliest formulations of Surrealism ... we thought film a marvellous mode of expression for the dream state."[34] In an article published in 1925, Jean Goudal argued that the cinema "constitutes a conscious hallucination, and utilizes this fusion of dream and consciousness which Surrealism would like to see realized in the literary domain."[35] Robert Desnos considered the cinema as capable of recapturing the dream experience. The principal aim of Surrealist cinema is to recreate the structure of the dream by immersing the viewer in a recognisable reality and introducing unexpected, illogical ruptures and juxtapositions in order to create the effect of *dépaysement* that characterises the dream. As such, it respects the conventions of spatial and temporal continuity in order for ruptures and illogical transitions to be experienced naturalistically, making the psychological effect on the spectator all the more powerful. Kuenzli draws attention to this feature of Surrealist film, when he states that the principal aim is to "put the viewer in a passive role, since their montage of incongruous sequences aimed at breaking open the spectator's unconscious drives and obsessions. Cinematographic techniques were thus only a means to disrupt the symbolic order, and to let the unconscious erupt."[36] Film was therefore exploited for its ability to act as a mirror of reality whilst at the same time offering, through its basic technical reliance on editing, ways to upset the laws of space and time fundamental to objective reality.

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[34] Philippe Soupault, quoted in Rudolph Kuenzli (ed.), *Dada and Surrealist Film*, p58.
[35] Jean Goudal, "Surréalisme et cinéma." First published in *La Revue hebdomadaire*, February, 1925. Translated and reprinted as "Surrealism and Cinema." In: *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema,* ed. Paul Hammond, p. 89.
[36] Rudolph Kuenzli, *Dada and Surrealist Film*, p. 9.

Surrealist film therefore stands in opposition to the aesthetic experiments of certain strands of the cinematic avant-garde and particularly the use of film by the Dadaists, who drew attention to the illusory nature of the medium by making the material construction of reality the central focus. Surrealist expression in film is not directed towards exploring the plastic possibilities of the medium but rather exploits its technical characteristics and places them in the service of certain psychological effects. Thus, attention is focused not on the form but on the content of the film. As Ramona Fotiade argues, "the 'technical' aspects of cinema should contribute to heightening the impression of reality, and not attempt to 'substitute' reality with an imaginary/artificial world."[37] However, despite this seemingly clear-cut theoretical distinction between one mode of expression and another, many films of the 1920s have been discussed in terms of both Dadaism and Surrealism. This situation arises in part from the sheer diversity of both movements and the fact that they lack a unified visual style, but also from the ability to relate particular techniques or approaches to either movement, even if the overall effect does not neatly correspond to accepted definitions of 'Dada film' or 'Surrealist film'. Let us consider again Man Ray's comment: "Tous les films que j'ai réalisés ont été autant d'improvisations. Je n'écrivais pas de scénario. C'était du cinéma automatique."[38] His improvisational approach – eschewing conventional methods of structure by leaving himself open to chance events – has much in common with Dadaism, yet the idea of automatism leans more towards the activities of the Surrealists in which the irrationality of the mind is explored in a controlled context or environment.

Surrealism and 'Emak Bakia'

Surrealism is important to discussions of *Emak Bakia* not only in terms of its historical positioning between the two major Surrealist manifestos but also from the perspective of Man Ray's conception of the film. In his autobiography he states: "I had complied with all the principles of Surrealism: irrationality, automatism, psychological and dreamlike sequences without apparent logic, and complete

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[37] Ramona Fotiade, "The slit eye, the scorpion and the sign of the cross: surrealist film theory and practice revisited," *Screen*, vol. 39 no. 2, Summer 1998, p. 117.
[38] Man Ray, "Témoignages," p. 43.

disregard of conventional storytelling."[39] It is undoubtedly as a result of this comment that many critics have highlighted Man Ray's intention to make a Surrealist film. Robert Short, although accepting that the film is not quite an example of cinematic surrealism nonetheless states, "Man Ray set out quite deliberately to make an unequivocally surrealist film."[40] Mimi White also shares the view that "*Emak Bakia* was clearly conceived by Ray in the context of Surrealism,"[41] along with Steven Kovács who argues that, although it "was in no way an official presentation of Surrealist principles, it was conceived as a Surrealist work by a person closely associated with the group."[42] The analysis provided by Kovacs thus highlights what he sees as "a number of tendencies, themes, and motifs of the Surrealists" of which the film is composed.[43] However, because these elements do not progress towards a total Surrealist work, Kovács continually builds them into a Dada/Surrealist framework, sliding between one discourse and another, without ever considering the theoretical implications of such an approach. The reluctance to categorise the film as belonging to either movement gives rise to an equally problematic representation of Man Ray as operating in some ambiguous no-man's land between the two modes of expression. Kovács states for instance: "*Emak Bakia* is a vivid example of the way in which chance was harnessed by a Surrealist filmmaker to create a purposeful film. Man Ray's method of shooting was random not by the careful design of other Surrealist poets who strove to achieve randomness, but simply because of his own Dada temperament."[44] Although this observation rightly distinguishes Man Ray's relationship with chance from that of the Surrealists, there is nonetheless a slightly confusing notion of Man Ray as Surrealist working in a Dadaist manner. This is reflected also in Kovács' division of the film into 'Surrealist sequences' and 'Dada sequences'.

The problem here is that the film is defined primarily in relation to Dada and Surrealism and is not considered in terms of how Man Ray's individual artistic concerns merge with the principles of these movements. The notion of a fluidly

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[39] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 222.
[40] Robert Short, *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema* (London: Creation Books, 2002), p27.
[41] White, "Two French Dada Films: *Entr'Acte* and *Emak Bakia*," p43.
[42] Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*, p. 123.
[43] Ibid. p. 124.
[44] Ibid. p. 124.

interchanging Dada/Surrealist film drives us into a theoretical dead end because it can, by definition, have no clear aim and is reduced, as Mimi White has suggested, to pointing out specific images or sequences that can be seen to relate to this or that concern of either movement. In the end, the most detrimental outcome of this approach is that Man Ray is seen as simply employing a range of ready-made motifs and devices. This tells us very little about the position of the moving image in the context of his work in general and ultimately perpetuates the consideration of early avant-garde film in terms of various cinematic manifestations of previously established ideas. What Kovacs defines in *Emak Bakia* as Surrealist motifs can be taken beyond such restricted interpretations when examined in relation to the development of Man Ray's artistic concerns. There is, for instance the motif of the eye, which recurs throughout the film and which, for Kovacs, represents a strong link with Surrealism. He cites the opening sequence as simultaneously drawing attention to the filmmaking process, whilst presenting the image of the eye as an element of Surrealist iconography. The problem here is that, as I have argued above, Surrealist vision relies on mimetic representation and illusionism into which certain motifs are integrated. By drawing attention to the film apparatus, Man Ray instantly breaks with this illusionism, making the motifs themselves seem redundant in the context of Surrealism, since they are devoid of a system that would bestow on them some kind of meaning. As a result, the image is significant as an image with meaning being directed inwards, in other words to an exploration of its formal properties. The presence of self-reflexive devices only serve to enhance and encourage such formal absorption since they invite an active visual awareness on the part of the viewer, as described in the previous chapter's discussion of a 'cinema of attractions'. As I will argue later in this chapter, the image of the eye and the nature of its presentation in various sections of *Emak Bakia* points specifically to the possibilities of cinematic vision, a theme that whilst not necessarily separate from certain concerns of Surrealism, does not depend exclusively on them.

As Man Ray states in his autobiography, the Surrealists did not accept *Emak Bakia* as an authentic cinematic representation of their aesthetic programme, despite his close connections with the movement and their acceptance of much of his photographic work (an issue to which I will return later). The main problem lies

perhaps in *Emak Bakia*'s overall structure, which is basically a collage of different visual effects organised into thematically coherent segments. The film may well contain all the elements of Surrealist expression to which Man Ray refers but they remain anchored to his characteristic interest in cinematography and the formal properties of the image. His own description of the film attests to this preoccupation with visual exploration:

> A series of fragments, a cine-poem with a certain optical sequence make up a whole that still remains a fragment. Just as one can much better appreciate the abstract beauty in a fragment of a classical work than its entirety, so this film tries to indicate the essentials in contemporary cinematography [...] its reasons for being are its inventions of light forms and movements, while the more objective parts interrupt the monotony of abstract inventions or serve as punctuation.[45]

The emphasis placed on the fragment is important here, since it is indeed the fragmentary nature of the film that keeps the spectator at a distance and which prevents any kind of conventional narrative identification. In contrast, Surrealism uses visual and narrative unity as a basis, with the aim of exploding it from the inside, forcing the viewer to reassess their codified patterns of thought in relation to reality and presenting them with another way of understanding the world. If *Emak Bakia* achieves a similar kind of challenge to the spectator's sensibility, it is rather on the level of vision and perception and not narrative signification. For instance, the repetition of certain shapes or movements unites otherwise unrelated visual phenomena and forces the viewer to accept certain relationships that he may not otherwise have considered. This involves, contrary to the techniques of the Surrealists, the downplaying of content and associative meaning in favour of a reinterpretation of the world in terms of formal relationships.

The principal way in which Man Ray achieves this effect is through abstraction, that is, by creating a kind of rupture between the image and the object to which it refers. However, it is not simply this visual representation that strikes us as important in this context but also the way in which the treatment of time and space is worked into an abstract framework. This aspect of the film will be looked at in more

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[45] Man Ray, "Emak Bakia," *Close up*, vol. 1 no. 2, August 1927, p. 40.

detail later in this chapter. For the moment it is useful to make some basic observations in this area. The first is that temporality in *Emak Bakia*, as is the case in *Le Retour à la raison*, is used predominantly as a formal tool for the development of various visual effects, often involving the repetition of particular movements that serve to create and juxtapose rhythmic structures. As Fotiade observes, this is one of the key areas in which Man Ray's cinematic preoccupations, as presented in *Emak Bakia*, cannot be reconciled with the Surrealist method:

> What Man Ray failed to notice was the incompatibility between the repetitive, mechanic aesthetic which animated early experiments with the abstract film, and the Surrealist understanding of the miraculous of everyday life situations (le merveilleux quotidien), and of the alienating effect (dépaysement) of images grounded in otherwise familiar, recognizable surroundings.[46]

In certain sections of *Emak Bakia*, the viewer is plunged into the unknown, a world that lacks the normal spatial laws of reality and reinvents vision as somehow linked but ultimately detached from our habitual experience of external phenomena. Surrealism, although similarly focused on presenting to the spectator a new order of things, aims to affect vision and experience beyond the film itself and as such, must connect with the viewer on the level of real life. This perhaps represents the ultimate difference between Man Ray's film and the practices of the Surrealists.

Optical Explorations

In the above comment, Man Ray refers to *Emak Bakia* as expressing 'the essentials in contemporary cinematography', in many ways echoing earlier conceptions of *cinéma pur* (pure cinema). That the aesthetic programme of both the Dada and Surrealist groups was opposed to the inherent formalism of this notion of pure cinema provides at least one perspective from which to view the difficult placement of the film within either camp. Peter Weiss echoes Man Ray's statement in his short description of the film: "Le film ne prétend pas être autre chose qu'une meditation subjective, l'expérience d'un artiste qui explore des possibilités optiques."[47] Subtly

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[46] Ramona Fotiade, "The untamed eye: surrealism and film theory," *Screen*, vol. 36 no.4, Winter 1995, p. 400.
[47] Peter Weiss, *Cinéma d'avant-garde* (Paris: L'Arche editeur, 1989), p. 33.

rejecting Dada and Surrealist interpretations, Weiss instead places the emphasis on the film as a highly personal expressive work, which derives first and foremost from the individual concerns of the artist. Since the main point of departure for this study is the realignment of Man Ray's films with the wider concerns expressed throughout his work, the notion that *Emak Bakia* functions primarily as a subjective statement is of crucial importance. Of equal importance is the idea that *Emak Bakia* functions as an exploration of subjective vision, or to be more specific, it examines the relationship between ordinary perception and the kind of perception that is produced mechanically through the cinematic apparatus. *Le Retour à la raison* makes tentative steps towards the development of a purely cinematic vision, , but it is in *Emak Bakia* that Man Ray most effectively creates a world of complex visual impressions that clearly draws a distinction between reality as we usually experience it and reality as seen through the lens of a camera.

Film and vision

In what ways then does the film express concerns related to vision? On a very basic level there is the previously discussed motif of the eye, most notably in the opening and closing shots. As White suggests: "The film's concern with vision, what we see and how we see it, frames the film in a very literal sense. The opening shot poses the problem specifically with reference to the machinery of cinema, as a cameraman stands by a movie camera pointed forward, toward the film audience, with an upside-down eye superimposed in place of the lens."[48] In the analogy it makes between the camera and the eye, this initial image seems to embody one of the most influential debates in the history of cinema and perhaps the most defining aspect of the avant-garde film: the question of the relationship between the human eye and the eye of the camera. The French Impressionist filmmakers and theorists of the 1910's and '20's, such as Germaine Dulac and Louis Delluc, argued fervently for the visual nature of the cinema to be acknowledged and utilised as its inherent quality, the key ingredient that would separate it from the other arts, specifically theatre and the novel to which it had become subservient through the popularity of the dramatic film. In the climate of modernism, where the search for the 'essential' and medium-specificity in the arts

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[48] White, "Two French Dada Films: *Entr'Acte* and *Emak Bakia*," p. 43.

was a key concern, the question of film as possessing distinct qualities and powers of creative expressive that were not available to the other arts was a way of elevating the status of the medium from that of popular entertainment to a serious art form in which important aesthetic developments could be made. Dulac, for instance, referred to the cinema as an "art of vision … an art of the eye."[49] However, the cinema's capacity for visual perception goes beyond the limits of the human eye and shows us things that we would not be able to see normally. This is the terrain occupied by the avant-garde film, as suggested by William Wees in his study of the centrality of vision in avant-garde modes of filmmaking:

> Any cinematic expression of vision must emerge from the optical, photochemical, and mechanical processes of making and showing films. Although these processes differ greatly from those of visual perception, they are designed to produce an image comparable to the world we see when we look around us. Hence the conventions of photographic realism accepted by the dominant film industry. Because of those conventions, most films offer a very limited and highly standardised version of "visual life": focused, stable, unambiguous representations of familiar objects in three-dimensional space. While it is true that this is similar to the image of the world ordinarily provided by the so-called normal vision, it is also true that we are capable of seeing the world quite differently. To express some of these other ways of seeing, avant-garde filmmakers have chosen to ignore, subvert, or openly break the rules of conventional filmmaking. Whether intuitively or by conscious intention, they have discovered that "questions of seeing" include questions about the cinematic apparatus itself.[50]

Man Ray demonstrates this awareness of the film apparatus through a presence/absence dichotomy, since the opening shot of the camera is immediately followed by a sequence of rayographs, that is, camera-less images. Thus, the relationship between the camera and the eye that the first shot seems to establish is destabilised through the presentation of a type of cinematic vision that does not depend on the apparatus, that is the camera, but on the material itself. It is at precisely this point that Man Ray goes beyond certain assumptions prevalent in

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[49] "Le cinéma art de vision, comme la musique est art de l'ouïe ne devait-il pas … nous mener vers l'idée visuelle faite de mouvement et de vie, vers la conception d'un art de l'oeil fait d'une inspiration sensible évoluant dans sa continuité et atteignant aussi bien que la musique la pensée et la sensibilité." Germaine Dulac, "L'essence du cinéma – l'idée visuelle." In her: *Écrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937)* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1994), p. 66.
[50] William Wees, *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p3.

avant-garde film theory about the importance of the camera-eye relationship by proposing that the camera represents only one way of creating cinematic vision. This self-conscious deconstruction of the material properties of the medium has frequently been related to the principles of the Dada movement, in which the status of artistic creation is placed under scrutiny. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the rayographs produced by Man Ray in both photography and cinema are often seen as a rejection of technique and of artistic skill that has the effect of "placing the genius in the same rank as the idiot."[51] By juxtaposing the self-referential image of filmmaking equipment with images created by a process that rejects this very equipment does indeed raise some serious questions about the relationship between the artist/filmmaker and his material. For instance, does dispensing with the camera and working directly with the celluloid create a more 'truthful' representation of reality? If cinema is fundamentally about illusionism, a fact that Dada films are generally understood to reveal, does this illusionist encoding exist at the level of the camera or the material onto which the images are fixed?

There is an element of paradox here since, although the rayograph process produces an imprint of external phenomena rather than what we could call a 'reflection' of reality created by the machinery of the camera, an 'unrealistic' effect enters into the process through the movement that is created at the moment of projection. Although all film images can be considered as essentially a series of static moments, with movement being created illusionistically through projection, in most cases movement is nonetheless present at the moment of filming and is not something that is produced artificially. In the case of Man Ray's rayography, however, the movement we see on the screen is purely a result of projection and would never have existed at any stage of the filmmaking process. The significance of the rayograph sequences is therefore more than a statement about the cinematic apparatus. Within the context of the film's concern with vision, they are understood as an exclusively cinematic way of seeing; that is to say that they represent a form of vision that is not possible with the human eye. The insertion of the shot of daisies amongst these initial rayograph images, like the fleeting image of the light bulb in *Le Retour à la raison*, invites the viewer to make distinctions and connections between

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[51] Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes "History of Dada." In: *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (2nd ed.), ed. Robert Motherwell (London: Belknap Press, 2005), p. 105.

the images and thus reflect on the nature of cinematic vision and its ability to recreate the process of seeing according to specific rules.

A key element of this process is the removal of the references that normally guide our perception of external reality. In *Emak Bakia*, as in *Le Retour à la raison*, Man Ray demonstrates that cinematic vision does not consist simply in mimetically reproducing reality but in creating an alternative to those processes to which we have become accustomed. That this is developed as a way of enhancing human perception and making the viewer aware that what we see and how we see are not necessarily interchangeable is evidenced in the alternation of different forms of representation in the film. There are images to which we can easily relate because they have a direct relationship to the world as we usually experience it, and there are other images that prove more difficult to assimilate into our visual repertoire because of their ambiguous nature. This is especially true of the sequences that follow the initial rayograph images. Here, distortions and light formations play a central role with movement facilitating the presentation of certain effects. The use of prismatic and other distorting lenses, reflecting crystals and rotating turntables allows Man Ray to create a completely new form of cinematic vision that rejects the notion of representation and subject in favour of pure form. Although he recounts in his autobiography that he "was thrilled, more with the idea of doing what [he] pleased than with any technical and optical effects [he] planned to introduce,"[52] there is no doubt that he revelled in the ability of this newly acquired equipment to give birth to a range of images whose subject is nothing more than that of light and movement. Like the previous sequences of rayographs, these images repudiate the traditional mimetic function of film by creating a form of vision that does not reflect the outside world but rather interprets it cinematically. This interpretation has the effect of liberating the eye from its attachment to rational perceptive processes and thus goes some way to explaining the way in which Surrealism played a role in Man Ray's conception of the film, even if the film itself does not achieve the effects sought by the Surrealists.

Spatial understanding is a key concern in *Emak Bakia*. The camera-less images are crucial in this respect since, placing emphasis on the materiality of film,

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[52] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 219.

they also highlight the depthless-ness of the filmstrip and, in projection, the screen onto which the images are projected. This is especially important in our understanding of Man Ray's relationship to the cinema, since it represents a particularly modernist sensibility in which the technical and physical properties of the medium are foremost in the artist's concerns and are made apparent in the finished work, having as much, if not more, impact than that which is represented. This can be seen in early modernist painting through the way in which the flatness of the canvas and the texture and colour of the paint is emphasised as the primary focus, with representation being only a secondary concern, if indeed it is present at all. The rayographs express this tendency since, aside from working directly with the celluloid and creating a one-dimensional image, they also draw attention to the dimensions of the screen.

The cinematic 'I'

Emak Bakia's opening shot goes further than simply pointing to the importance of vision and the relationship between the human eye and the camera eye. It inscribes into the film an awareness of the subjective eye or the authorial 'I'. What White fails to mention in her discussion of the film's first shot is that the cameraman, presented anonymously in her account, is actually Man Ray. Thus the interrelationship between the eye and the lens is equated with the 'I', the self-referential statement about the act of creation behind the images. Kovacs has argued that this shot "is at once a personal affirmation of Man Ray as filmmaker, a cinematic trick showing the mechanics of the filming process, and perhaps the first presentation of the human eye as an element of Surrealist iconography. It is an ingenious opening, simultaneously a Dada and Surrealist device which also happens to introduce the author as creator."[53] The links with the two movements are undeniable, although perhaps more so in terms of the self-reflexive strategies of the Dadaists. What seems more important however, is the understanding of this self-reflexivity as representing an integral part of Man Ray's work as an artist, a recurring element that points to his life-long need to construct and reconstruct his personality through his art. This is visible as early as 1914 in a painting entitled simply *Man Ray*, where the artist's name and the year

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[53] Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*, p. 124.

serve as the subject. It is also evident in the many different self-portraits he created over the years, beginning with *Self Portrait in ink, Ridgefield* (1914), that features in *A Book of Divers Writings* by Adon Lacroix, a portfolio of poems to which Man Ray added illustrations and published together with Lacroix in 1915, and *Self Portrait* (1916) (**Fig. 11**), a work constructed from an oil painting featuring a hand print, to which were added two bells and a push button. The fact that this piece openly invited the participation of the audience (the pushing of the button), whose disappointment was premeditated (the non-ringing bell), reflects an important exchange between Man Ray and his public that demonstrates his own personal dictum: to always do the opposite of what people expected of him.[54] Although the self-portrait is a common device used by the artist to present a version of him/herself to the outside world, it is arguably with the work of Man Ray, and of course his friend Marcel Duchamp, that the personal reference is developed into a truly modernist practice.

The self-reflexivity of *Emak Bakia* also coincides with debates taking place in French film theory and criticism around the nature of cinematic vision and the notion of the objectivity of the camera. In the same year as the film's release, Paul Ramain argued: "Avant l'objectif, organe physique de représentation, il y a un nerf qui le fait vivre: c'est la volonté et l'âme sensibilisée du Cinéaste lui-même. L'objectif n'est pas lui-même: il est nous-mêmes"[55] Ramain's statement provides a counter-argument to those writers, such as Jean Epstein, who claimed that the camera eye differed from the human eye in the way it captures and records reality, unhampered by the intellectual processes of interpretation and association that result from the human eye's connection to the brain.[56] Ramain suggests instead that objective reality in a 'état sauvage', to use the term employed by Epstein[57], cannot

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[54] "A ma sortie de l'école, comme je pensais à mon avenir, j'en suis arrivé à une conclusion: *faire ce que l'on n'attendait pas de moi.*" Man Ray in an interview with Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper, "Camera-Interview," *Camera*, no. 54, Februrary 1975, p. 37.

[55] Paul Ramain, quoted in Noureddine Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1995), p. 87.

[56] This position is summarised by Nouredine Ghali: "Notre oeil est ainsi, par rapport à l'objectif de la caméra, impuissant à percevoir les beautés et les drames qui se déroulent devant lui. L'objectif enregistre sans sélection d'aucune sorte tout ce qui se présente à lui, car il n'est pas doué de pensée. À la différence de notre oeil qui est relié au cerveau grâce au nerf optique; lequel cerveau nous oblige à "traiter" et à interpréter ce que nous voyons. L'objectif, lui, est incapable de penser; son sort est lié à la mécanique et à l'optique et l'image qu'il perçoit est ensuite révélée grâce aux procédés chimiques." p. 87.

[57] Jean Epstein quoted in Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories*, p. 86.

exist in the cinema since reality must always be transmitted through the sensibility of the filmmaker. From this we can deduce that the creative power of the cinema lies not in its possession of an objective eye that surpasses that of human perception but rather in its ability to extend vision to include unlimited subjective perspectives of the world. The Russian filmmaker, Dziga Vertov, whose seminal avant-garde work, *Man With a Movie Camera* was released in 1929, evoked the complex relationship between the machinery of the camera and the subjectivity of the artist when he stated in a 1923 manifesto, "I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it."[58] Vertov's statement draws an important modernist parallel/interchange between the human and the machine, in other words, the filmmaker and his apparatus.

There are in fact a number of similarities that can be drawn between Vertov and Man Ray, despite their clear national and political differences. Vertov, like Man Ray in *Emak Bakia*, made extensive use of cinematic trickery such as superimposition and prismatic lenses. Much of the imagery in *Man With a Movie Camera* mirrors that found in certain sections of Man Ray's film, especially the presence of the female body. The traditional Russian dance in the former also brings to mind the Charleston sequence of the latter. There is also the important position of music in the film, which, as Michael O'Pray signals, Vertov had always envisioned even though the original version is silent. O'Pray argues that the music "underlines its structure"[59], an observation that could equally be made in terms of *Emak Bakia*, where changes in rhythm and tempo brought about by different musical tracks highlight and compliment corresponding developments on a visual level. The most interesting comparison to be made exists on the level of self-reflexivity in terms of the practice of filmmaking but also the presence of the filmmaker himself. In *Emak Bakia*, Man Ray draws attention to himself as the creator of the work in a number of ways. The first of these is, of course, the use of the rayographs, the camera-less images. This is one of the ways in which Man Ray's cinema goes beyond that of Vertov in suggesting the relationship between the filmmaker and the machine, since,

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[58] Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1984), p. 17.
[59] Michael O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), p.34.

as I have already discussed, the machine itself is eschewed in favour of a technique that involves a more direct relationship between the filmmaker and his material. Indeed, the main reason for which Man Ray's photographic rayographs were so popular with the Dadaists and Surrealists alike was their apparent transmission of the artist's psyche through a process akin to that of automatic writing. Tristan Tzara, in his introduction to Man Ray's collection of rayographs, *Champs délicieux*, evokes the body and sensibility of the artist in creating the images: "Le photographe a inventé une nouvelle méthode: il présente à l'espace l'image qui l'excède, et l'air avec ses mains crispées, ses avantages de tête, la capte et la garde dans son sein."[60] Jean Cocteau, in an open letter to Man Ray published in *Les Feuilles libres* also stated: "Vos planches sont les objets eux-mêmes, non photographiés par une lentille, mais directement interposés par votre main de poète entre la lumière et le papier sensible."[61] The main issue here is that self-reflexivity in *Emak Bakia* must be seen as a part of a bigger picture that relates not only to Dada and Surrealism but also to Man Ray's individual concerns and practices as an artist and to much broader questions that were being posed at the time in relation to cinematic vision. This is emphasised by the use of similar techniques by other filmmakers working within significantly different contexts, unrelated to either Dada or Surrealism, such as Vertov and the Hungarian Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy, whose film, *Lichtspiel* (1930), creates similar compositions to those found in *Emak Bakia*.

To return to the question of reality filtered through the eye of the artist, what we experience in *Emak Bakia* is an awareness of objective and subjective vision that relates to the use of figurative and non-figurative imagery. Looking again at Man Ray's comment about the film (page 91), abstraction is referred to in terms of subjective vision, since the "objective parts" are understood as interrupting "the monotony of abstract inventions," the latter being, by extension, an expression of subjectivity. It is first of all interesting to co csnsider the reference to certain parts of the film as inventions, a detail that highlights the role of the filmmaker in creating images, rather than simply representing or copying reality. In using this term, Man

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[60] Tristan Tzara, "La photographie à l'envers," in *Champs délicieux* (Paris: Société générale d'imprimerie et édition, 1922).
[61] Jean Cocteau, "Lettre ouverte à Man Ray, photographe américain," in *Les Feuilles libres*, no 26, April/May 1922, p. 134.

Ray also draws attention to himself as a kind of visual scientist, something that is supported in his accumulation of various paraphernalia, which he used to create different kinds of images and effects. Again, the concentration on so-called "subjective", non-figurative imagery characterises early modernist art in its turn away from objective representations of external reality and towards the expression of inner emotional states. It was in the graphic films made in Germany at the beginning of the 1920s that this approach was translated into the cinematic medium, producing what Walther Ruttman described in the title of a paper from 1919 as 'painting with the medium of time'.[62] Hans Richter in his abstract films, aimed to generate emotion and feeling by following the same laws as those of musical rhythm.

The fact that Man Ray conceived of *Emak Bakia* in terms of figurative/non-figurative and objective/subjective dichotomies supports the notion that his key interests lay within the realms of the formal possibilities of cinematic vision. However, a further crucial observation can be made in relation to this statement – that the film was purposefully structured according to certain rules, so that 'objective' imagery would alternate with the more 'subjective' sections. This challenges the common perception that the film expresses, above all, a random, illogical structure. Barbara Rose in particular represents this tendency when she states that due to "the randomness of Man Ray's approach, one cannot really speak of the structure of *Emak Bakia*, which [...] is basically a series of disconnected visual gags."[63] Understanding certain sections of the film as expressing a form of subjective vision certainly goes beyond such limited interpretations. Importantly, this perspective allows us to consider Man Ray as a precursor of later avant-garde filmmakers like Stan Brakhage, who use the medium of film to explore and represent the wide spectrum of human vision that is traditionally absent from the cinema since visual representations are generally tied to narrative demands. The move from an external reality to an internal one is perhaps what Man Ray understood as Surrealist, yet, instead of transmitting unconscious thought processes and desires in a sustained figurative context as is found in the dream, *Emak Bakia* concentrates on a formally abstract interpretation of subjectivity. Thus, the structure of the film can be

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[62] Walther Ruttman, "Painting with the Medium of Time." In: *The German Avant-Garde Film of the 1920's*, ed. Walter Schobert (Munich: Goethe Institut, 1989), p. 102-3.
[63] Rose, "Kinetic Solutions to Pictorial Problems: The Films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy," p. 70.

understood not as representing subconscious thought but as developing a formally determined system of vision.

Thinking visually

As is also the case with *Le Retour à la raison*, a number of theoretical accounts of *Emak Bakia* centre on its non-narrative component.[64] In attempting to highlight its Surrealist qualities, Man Ray himself refers to the film in terms of its "complete disregard of conventional storytelling." However, as we have seen from Kuenzli's statement, this would place the film within the realms of Dadaism. The question of narrative is more pertinent in this film than in *Le Retour à la raison* precisely because of the greater emphasis on moments of mimesis, along with the inclusion of certain figurative 'sequences' that for some critics suggest the "possibility of narrative"[65] and seem to present a counterpoint to the more formally dictated sections. This sense of narrative possibility is brought about by the way in which individual shots relate to each other following certain rules of logic and continuity. For instance, in the first figurative sequence of the car journey there is a gradual accumulation of details through the progression of shots and each separate shot seems to relate logically to the next. A car with a female driver is followed by a shot of the car tyre, the car begins to move, a travelling shot taken from inside the car describes the speed at which the car is travelling and shows, from a sort of point-of-view shot, what the driver sees. Further on in the film a number of shots are edited together to show a woman walking into a room, getting ready at a dressing table and finally walking towards a window at which point the viewer is presented with what seems to be a point of view shot. Like later Surrealist films, certain conventions of cinematic construction are employed, such as continuity editing and shot-reverse-shot, which rely on logical connections to be made between them. In contrast to those films however, this adoption of the rules of classical filmmaking does not provide a sustained and stable framework from which the Surrealist content operates, but exists simply as an exercise in cinematic construction and deconstruction. Man

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[64] Carl I. Belz states: "As Ray says, the film consists of a number of fragments. The relationships among them, however, are not of a progressive nature. No story is presented, nor is there a visual or purely artistic conclusion." "The Film Poetry of Man Ray." *Criticism*, no. 7, 1965, p. 121.
[65] White, "Two French Dada Films: *Entr'acte* and *Emak Bakia*," p. 44.

Ray does not necessarily break the rules of narrative but uses them for different visual effects.

This can be seen in the way montage is employed as a way of breaking down and analysing cinematic perception and exploring particular techniques for their visual and rhythmic possibilities outside of narrative signification. What is important here is the way Man Ray encourages the viewer to make visual associations on a number of levels. In two sections of the film Man Ray experiments with different types of editing to create specific perceptual effects. Towards the end of the travelling sequence mentioned above, a shot of a herd of sheep moving alongside the car suddenly creates a sense of chaos due to the convergence of two sets of objects moving in opposite directions. The following shot enhances this feeling by having the car actually drive over the camera, which has been placed in a fixed position on the road. A close-up image of a pig is followed by a very brief blurred shot, which is in turn juxtaposed with that that of the pig suddenly jolting. The final image, created by throwing the camera into the air, completes the series of juxtapositions by purposely combining speed with an unpredictable register of images to give the impression of collision. This section demonstrates Man Ray's interest in building visual effects and in structuring the audience's accumulation of visual details related not to narrative development but to the representation of feeling or sensation. This form of montage can also be found in a later sequence in which the hands of a banjo player are juxtaposed with the legs of a woman dancing the Charleston. The alternation of the shots was conceived by Man Ray to be accompanied by a piece of music by Django Reinhart, which compliments the gradual building of visual rhythm. This section of the film, like that of the earlier collision, makes use of the expressive possibilities of montage beyond the function of logically linking together narrative elements. The images themselves may be figurative but they are unrelated to any kind of logical progression and actually exclude narrative associations due to their 'abstraction' from context. The hands of the banjo player and the legs of the dancer are isolated from the rest of their body and as such they reflect and fit in with other repetitive movements in the film.

In his autobiography Man Ray refers to *Emak Bakia* as "purely optical, made only to appeal to the eyes," and "the result of a way of thinking as well as seeing."[66] Like the earlier comment about the film presenting a series of fragments, this statement points to the centrality of vision as the film's organising force. Taken together, these personal reflections allow us to consider *Emak Bakia* in terms of the interrelationship between human and cinematic vision since the earlier comment emphasises the expression of cinematic specificity, whilst the later one deals with the specificity of vision itself. From this we can deduce that Man Ray's intention was to create a form of cinematic vision that would reflect the eye in its pure state, in other words to unite the mechanical eye of the camera with that of the creator and, in the viewing process, the spectator. In the theoretical writings of the 1920s the inherent capacity of the cinema to create a form of vision freed from the a priori discourse of intellectual association was a common theme. It was understood by some theorists that the camera occupies a privileged position since it 'sees' and records reality from an objective perspective, a perspective that is denied to the human eye due to the thought processes that naturally accompany human vision. André Levinson, for example, states, "peintre et poète, l'objectif de la *caméra* n'est pas un penseur."[67] In contrast to this view, Man Ray does not exclude thought from his concept of vision. To speak of the film as purely visual and as a way of thinking initially seems paradoxical (and thus not altogether unusual given Man Ray's fondness for contradictory statements) until one considers the film from the logic of thinking visually. Indeed, this is one of the major concerns in *Le Retour à la raison*, where connections between images are made through their visual similarity or difference, transcending the everyday signification attached to the actual objects that serve the images. The key to both achieving and understanding this process of visual thought lies within the realms of representation and it is in this respect that *Emak Bakia* demonstrates a progression of ideas from Man Ray's first film.

Emak Bakia must therefore be understood from the perspective of a system of relations between images and their effect of the viewer. The key factor in this development of relations is that the images are generally dissociated from the figural

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[66] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 219.
[67] André Levinson, quoted in Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories*, p. 87.

relationships found in Surrealist film where meaning depends largely on establishing systems of metaphor and metonymy. In this sense it is important to consider the possibility of a purely visual narrative. Edward A. Aitken, in his reassessment of *Emak Bakia* draws attention to Tzvetan Todorov's notion that narrative "is constituted in the tension of formal categories, difference and resemblance."[68] Indeed, as the previous chapter illustrates, Man Ray's work demonstrates a clear interest in the use of similarity and difference as organising principles, which seem to represent, in themselves, a type of narrative of images. We can see this most clearly in the alternation of sequences featuring very clear figurative images with sections that express an overriding sense of formlessness. The sequences that are usually considered as 'narrative fragments' and thus the most representative of objectivity generally give way to more formally complex moments. For example, the car journey sequence can be understood in terms of a trajectory from figuration to abstraction. This is seen in the blurred impressions of the passing scenery and the random register of images during the collision.

Light and Movement

I have already argued, in relation to the theme of cinematic vision, that *Emak Bakia* represents Man Ray's interest in exploring the essentials of the film medium, thus aligning him with a particularly modernist sensibility. I have also highlighted the sense of compositional structure in the film and the way in which this relates to his work more generally. My final observations build on and develop these previous arguments by placing emphasis on the aspects of movement and light. These are central elements of Man Ray's work in virtually all the arts in which he was involved and can be seen to culminate and find their ultimate expression in his films. *Emak Bakia*, however, is the work in which the qualities of light and movement are most fully explored. Steven Kovacs has made the following statement in relation to the development of these concerns:

> It seems that between the making of his first film and the second Man Ray discovered that film was more than just moving pictures, that although it was

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[68] Quoted in Edward A. Aitken, ""Emak Bakia" Reconsidered," *Art Journal*, vol. 43 no. 3, Fall 1983, p. 241.

> able to animate an object, it was above all a medium of light. Thus, he moved from animated photography to the film of light.[69]

Although I would agree that there is a clear progression of concerns from *Le Retour à la raison* to *Emak Bakia* – an aspect that I have already pointed to – I would modify Kovacs's view to suggest that light is brought into play with movement in *Emak Bakia*, and that movement, rather than being replaced by light as a key concern, is pushed into new territory and becomes an even stronger characteristic.

Different forms of movement in 'Emak Bakia'

My view on the important role played by movement in *Emak Bakia* derives in part from the fact that a number of different types of movement can be detected in the film. There is, first of all, the 'artificial' movement of the rayograph images, which appears disordered and chaotic, throwing the spectator into unknown territory. The inserted shot of daisies not only juxtaposes camera-based with camera-less but introduces the 'actual' movement of the camera. This type of movement represents a clear development from *Le Retour à la raison* in which the camera rarely moves from a fixed position. In that film, the camera simply registers kinetic changes through time but never itself becomes involved in this process. We could therefore adapt the statement made by Kovacs to argue that between the two films Man Ray also discovered the mobility of the camera and understood the possibility of creating various kinetic effects. This discovery is no doubt related to his growing knowledge of film technology along with the financial freedom he was given in making the film. The money provided by Arthur Wheeler allowed Man Ray to buy "the finest professional camera available in France at the time."[70] He had also "acquired a small automatic hand camera for special takes."[71] It was probably the mobility of the latter that prompted Man Ray to experiment with different forms of movement. This is particularly evident in the previously discussed car journey sequence that ends with a collision. Here, the freedom of movement is recognised and exploited by Man Ray in the travelling sequence (a similar sequence is found a few years later in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*). In terms of the pure dynamism of this section of the film and the

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[69] Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*, p. 124.
[70] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 219.
[71] Ibid. p. 220.

attention it places on the dizzying perceptual effects created by speed and movement, it can be related to the proclamations about and the visual representations of movement, energy and conflict produced by the Futurists (although there is little evidence to show that Man Ray was in contact with any of the Futurist artists, it is likely that he was at least familiar with some of their declarations). Aside from its development of certain techniques of montage, the collision demonstrates one of the key areas of Man Ray's growing awareness of the creative possibilities of movement. He states in relation to this section:

> One of the most interesting shots I made was while being driven by Rose Wheeler in her Mercedes racing car; I was using my hand camera while she was driving eighty or ninety miles an hour, being pretty badly shaken up, when we came upon a herd of sheep on the road. She braked to within a few feet of the animals. This gave me an idea – why not show a collision? I stepped out of the car, followed the herd while winding up the camera and set it in movement, then threw it thirty feet up into the air, catching it again.[72]

That he later refers to this shot in terms of the 'thrill' it provided again looks back to the Futurists' association of speed and movement with corresponding emotions of excitation and elation. The effect of disorientation to which this shot gives rise is repeated later on in the film when a rotation of the camera shows "the sea revolving so that it [becomes] sky and the sky sea."[73] This reference to the changing places of the sky and sea is crucial since it points to the way in which the movement of the camera allows Man Ray to develop the theme of inversion, discussed earlier, as an element of kinetic transformation. The effect created by the rotation of the camera clearly interested Man Ray as it also reappears on a number of occasions in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé.*

Technique is again related to technology in the movement that is created through the film's most abstract sequences, those to which I have referred above as expressing a more subjective sensibility. Here the camera is static but a number of devices are employed to create a complex sensation of movement and transformation. The temporal development of the refractions, reflections and distortions of the image is made possible through the use of a turntable. The key

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[72] Ibid, p. 220.
[73] Ibid, p. 220.

element here is repetition since the rotation allows a continuous effect to be established, which places the viewer in a relatively passive position due to the hypnotic nature of the images. In contrast to the mechanised rhythms found in *Ballet Mécanique*, these sections of *Emak Bakia* represent a more organic movement, featuring soft-edged forms, which seem to morph into themselves through the various distorting effects. With *Emak Bakia* Man Ray also discovered movement through animation and a number of sequences are created using this technique. Animation was especially important for Man Ray as it once again allowed him to extend the creative possibilities of inversion, this time of animate and inanimate qualities. As I have described earlier in this chapter, one sequence involves geometric blocks of different shapes and sizes, which gradually build themselves seemingly unaided by the human hand. In another, various objects dance together, appearing and disappearing and arranging themselves into different combinations. At the end of this section of the film, a drawing of a human figure (*Homme d'affaires*) brings itself to life by jumping from one pre-defined stage of movement to the next. Thus, in another self-referential gesture, movement becomes not simply an effect, but rather the subject, inviting reflection on the nature of its function as a creative device.

In other parts of the film, movement is presented in relation to cognitive processes, highlighting the fact that understanding is something that takes place in time. The scrolling text across the building façade is 'read' by the spectator, not as a pattern of lights but as a message with some possible meaning. By interrupting the movement Man Ray prevents this process of understanding and, as some critics have suggested, brings the focus of attention back to the visual properties of the image, supporting the suggestion made in the previous section that *Emak Bakia* seeks to organise thought through uniquely visual structures. The moving lights and the way they are filmed reflect a fascination with the modern world – there is something fantastical about the way the scrolling text seems completely detached from its surroundings, just as the fairground lights in *Le Retour à la raison* seem to float independently in space. The interruption of the text and the resulting nonsensical message adds to this effect since the unhinged meaning is reflected symbolically in the physical suspension of the letters themselves.

Another way in which Man Ray creates a sense of structure through movement is in the use of repetition. Despite the differences between the two films, to which I have already drawn attention, repetition can be seen as one of the key ways in which *Emak Bakia* relates to *Ballet Mécanique* and thus attests to the influence of Man Ray in the making of what is generally understood to be the work of the painter Fernand Léger. Repetition is a recurring feature in the films of Man Ray and reflects one of the ways in which the machine aesthetic of Dada comes into play with a more general fascination with the temporal quality of the cinema represented by the German abstract and French Impressionist filmmakers. The ability to manipulate reality through repetition rather than respect mimetic continuity reflects a revolutionary approach that focuses attention on the purely illusionist nature of film by highlighting its fundamental means of construction – editing. Repetitive movement dominates *Emak Bakia* from shots #28 to #48. At this point in the film, attention is focused almost exclusively on the effects created through different kinds of repetition. Following on from the collision sequence, we are presented with a shot of a woman's feet getting out of a car. Through the use of superimposition, Man Ray repeats the action several times – each time a different set of legs – to give the impression of an impossibly excessive amount of women having occupied the car (a witty allusion to the herd of sheep witnessed in the previous sequence?). This humorous use of excess as an artistic tool is characteristic of Man Ray's approach and highlights one way in which his work can be seen to reflect a Dada sensibility. To take a similar sequence from *Ballet Mécanique* – the repeated action of a washerwoman climbing stairs – we can see how the two films build on viewer expectations and the anticipation of narrative development. Of the washerwoman sequence Léger states: "We persist up to the point when the eye and the spirit of the spectator will no longer accept. We drain out of it every bit of its value as a spectacle up to the moment when it becomes insupportable."[74] The reference to cinematic spectacle is interesting, since it once again brings us back to the link between pre-narrative cinema and the avant-garde.

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[74] Fernand Léger quoted in Judi Freeman, "Bridging Purism and Surrealism: The Origins and Production of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*," in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph Kuenzli, p. 39.

What seems to set Man Ray's approach apart from that of Léger is his exploration of superimpositon as a form of repetition. Although the multiplying feet can be understood as a Dada technique, emphasising the illusionistic nature of the cinematic image, it also relates to the aesthetic use of superimposition by the Impressionist filmmakers, such as Dulac, Delluc and Epstein. The following section, however, is based wholly on the power of editing to create rhythm, again suggesting a link with *Ballet Mécanique*. The alternation of a banjo player with dancing legs – a sequence to which I have already referred in relation to its use of associative montage – does indeed approach "the point of exasperation"[75] towards which Léger drives, a view that is supported by Man Ray's comment that it "might annoy certain spectators."[76] However, even if the sequence may indeed have shocked audiences of the time – not simply because of its gratuitous repetition, but also because of the isolation of body parts from their respective whole –, the overall effect is one of unity and of the building of cinematic rhythm. Man Ray uses musical rhythm as a formal structure and the sequence was clearly conceived in the context of the accompanying jazz music. A sense of overall harmony is created by bringing together the individual elements of image and music to create a rhythmic unity. One also finds examples of temporal expansion and condensation, further attesting to the film's complex structures in relation to time and movement. This is particularly noticeable in the next sequence in which a woman (Rose Wheeler) prepares herself in front of a dressing table. What is immediately noticeable about this section is the fact that each of these actions, such as brushing hair, applying lipstick and putting on pearls is divided into separate, self-contained shots and expresses what would be seen in conventional cinema as a kind of narrative economy in presenting only the crucial details. This allows us to see the way in which a figurative/abstract dichotomy also involves notions of temporal representation. The 'objective' sequences have a very defined sense of time whereas the more 'subjective' ones make the passage of time seem fluid and immeasurable, often combining formlessness with a corresponding sense of timelessness.

Finally, there are, throughout the film, subtle movements of the face, again suggesting a link with sections of *Ballet Mécanique*, in which we see Kiki's smiling

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[75] Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 51.
[76] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 220.

lips. Three separate shots show the faces of different women, breaking into a smile, raising eyebrows or, in one example, muttering a few words to the camera. These shots relate directly to Man Ray's interest in photographic portraiture and from this perspective can be seen as a clear instance of what could be called 'kinetic photography', that is, they demonstrate an attempt to put his photographic compositions into motion. Rather than freezing a facial expression in time, Man Ray exploits the temporal nature of film to show the development of that expression. Sophie Winqvist evokes another important issue in relation to the transference of photographic conventions to the medium of film when she states: "One difference between still photography and film is that the model is expected to look straight at the camera in a still, while convention forbids the direct gaze in film."[77] By approaching film simply in terms of moving photographs, Man Ray breaks one of the fundamental rules of narrative cinema designed to preserve the illusion of reality by not drawing attention to the camera as creator of that illusion. So by extension, this process of "pointing to the film apparatus as an illusion-producing machine,"[78] associates *Emak Bakia* with a Dada approach to the cinema, whilst also pointing to the complex relationship between Man Ray the photographer and Man Ray the filmmaker. This relationship is further evidenced in the role played by light, which is established, often in conjunction with movement, as one of the film's central aesthetic concerns.

Painting with light

In a speech made on November 13, 1924, Germaine Dulac proclaimed: "Illusions! Sur l'écran jouent des ombres et des lumières: des images se forment, se déforment, se succèdent, s'effacent … ombre, lumière, illusions! C'est le cinéma."[79] This comment, made two years before the release of *Emak Bakia*, seems to relate directly to the visual content of the film, almost as if Man Ray were answering Dulac's wishes for a cinema based on the elements of movement and light. The creative potential of light is one of the defining aspects of Man Ray's work as both a

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[77] Sophie Winqvist, "A MAN? – Thoughts on Man Ray's sexual identity." In: *Man Ray* (Moderna Museet, 2004), p. 39.
[78] Rudolph Kuenzli (ed.), *Dada and Surrealist Film*, p. 7.
[79] Germaine Dulac, "Images et Rythmes." In her *Écrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937)*, p. 45.

photographer and filmmaker. Techniques that were recognised as his trademark, particularly that of 'solarization', were achieved principally through the manipulation of light in a way that radically departed from conventional photographic processes. The compositions found in many of his photographs depend largely on the potential of certain objects and their arrangement in the frame to create complex geometrical effects through the casting of shadows. Indeed, as Francis Nauman has observed, the shadow and the reflected image become increasing concerns in Man Ray's work from around 1916 onwards, even before he began working seriously in the field of photography.[80] This is seen particularly in *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself With Her Shadows* of 1916, a work made from coloured sheets of construction paper, which depicts the shadows cast by the ropedancer as huge abstract forms that dominate the picture. *Ballet Silhouette*, an ink drawing of the same year, is similar to *The Rope Dancer* in the way in which the figures and the dark patches of shadow cast by them are given equal attention, creating an interesting interplay of juxtaposing elements. The photographs *Woman* (*Shadows*, 1918) (**Fig. 12**) and *Man* (1918) (**Fig. 13**) express the importance of the object in relation to its shadow. The former depicts a constructed object of two metal light detectors and six clothes pegs attached to a plate of glass, whilst the latter simply features an eggbeater. In both images, it is not only the object itself that is of interest but the extension of meaning created by the shadows that seem to merge the abstract with the concrete. In relation to these works, Man Ray confirmed: "The shadow is as important as the real thing,"[81] thus placing his relationship to the effects of light at the forefront of his aesthetic concerns. The rayographs that he produced extensively during the 1920s and 1930s represent a process of pure shadow creation and, in light of this comment, must have seemed to Man Ray like the perfect form of photographic expression in which only the shadow of the object remains.

It is because of this interest in light and shadow that the majority of Man Ray's photography was carried out in the studio, an environment that provided him with the perfect conditions for his experiments with light. Although he did

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[80] Francis Nauman, "Man Ray, 1908-1921: From an Art in Two Dimensions to the Higher Dimension of Ideas." In: *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, ed. Merry Foresta (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 77.
[81] Man Ray quoted in Nauman, p. 77.

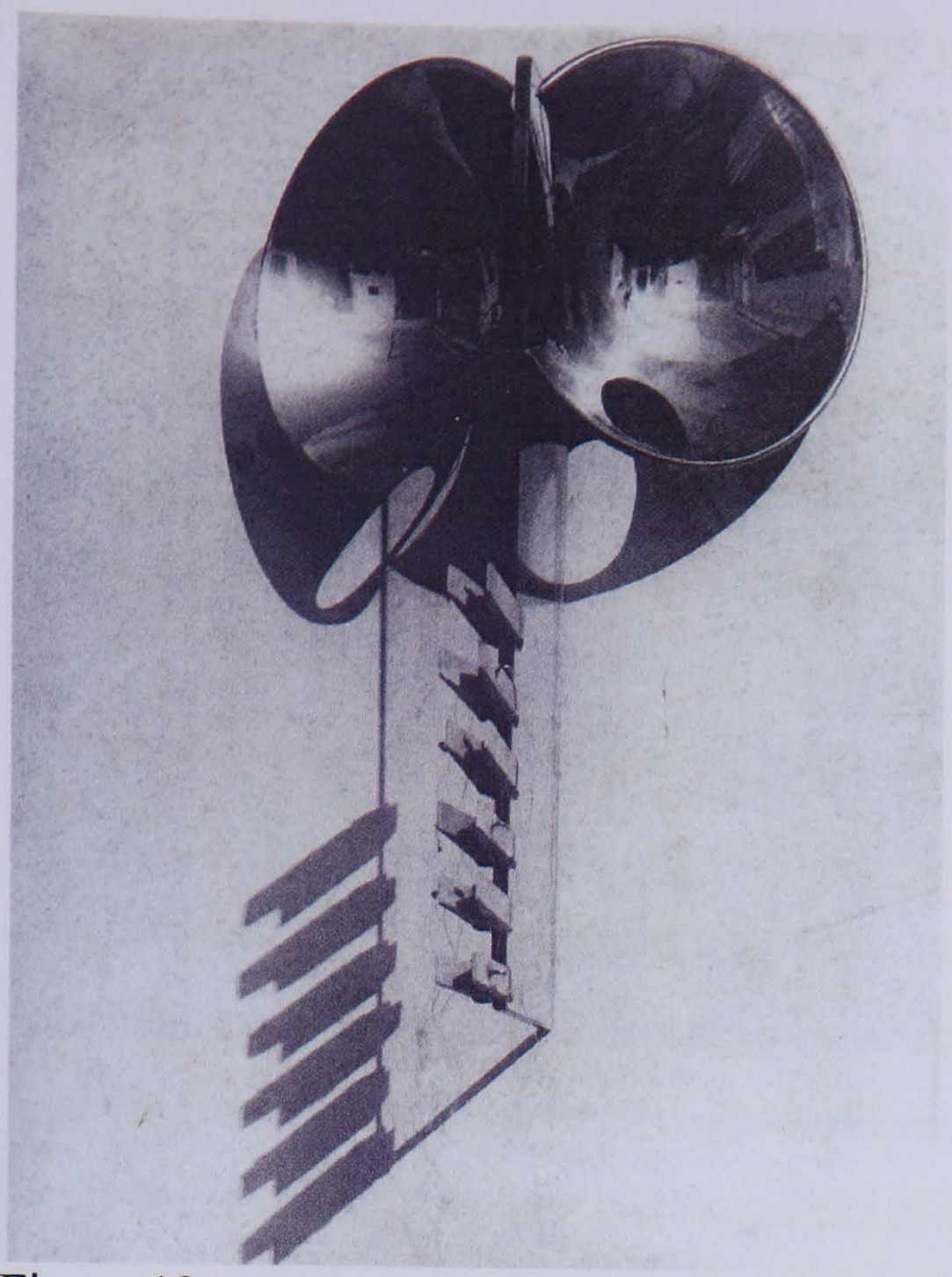

Figure 12.

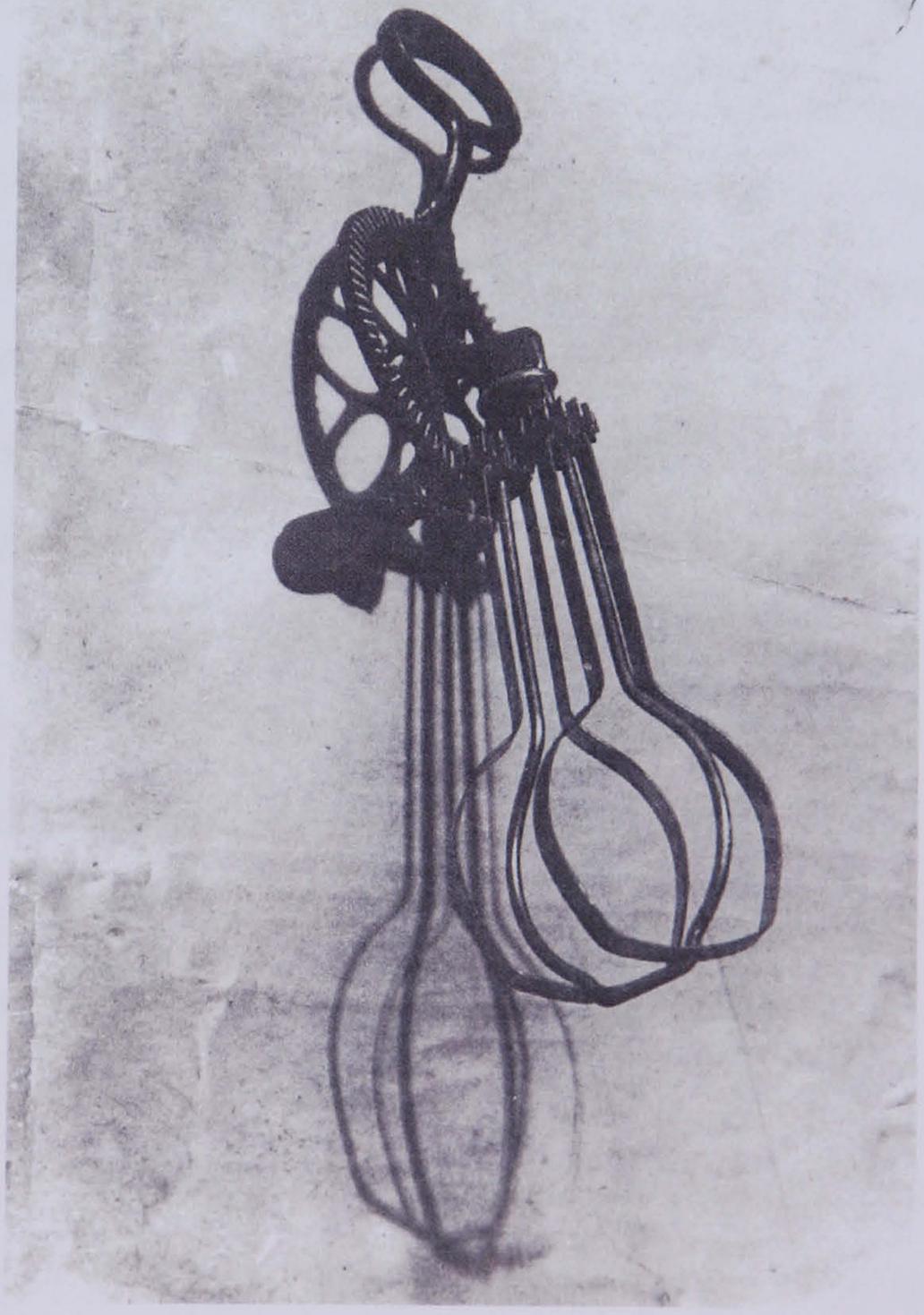

Figure 13.

occasionally shoot in external locations, it is the more staged work that expresses his diverse yet characteristic style. Despite being known for his improvisational flair, making him particularly popular with the Dadaists, his working practice demanded control as much as it demonstrated artistic freedom. Therefore, the ability to meticulously control the aesthetic effects of light and shadow was paramount to his working process, and it was often these effects that took precedence over the actual subject of the photograph. Naturally then, his early films were also shot predominantly in the studio and share many qualities with his still photographic work in relation to the composition of shots and the play of light and shadow. In these films, like the photographs, objects seem to have been chosen for their potential to interact with light in a specific way. For instance, the suspended egg box divider in *Le Retour à la raison* and Man Ray's sculpture *Fishmerman's Idol* in *Emak Bakia* are relatively inexpressive as actual objects but when brought into play with their own shadows they become the site of the most interesting visual effects.

Aside from these studio-based shots, light also plays an important role in the external shots recorded at night time, where Man Ray capitalises on the numerous arrangements of artificial lights with which one is continually surrounded. In order to maximise their creative effect, these sections are filmed naturally, drawing on the diminished sensibility of the camera lens in the absence of natural light, thus giving rise to a darkened background with only the lights themselves actually visible. The fairground lights in *Le Retour à la raison*, the scrolling announcement of *Emak Bakia* and the approaching car headlights that begin *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* all seem to relate to Man Ray's later photographs that feature artificial light, such as *La Ville* (*The City*, 1931) and *Montparnasse* (1961), two very similar images that present a collage of various neon signs in the centre of Paris, the former featuring an illuminated Eiffel Tower. This concentration on the various forms of artificial light represents a particular fascination with modern life that is commonly seen as a key feature of avant-garde works of the early twentieth-century. That Man Ray produced in 1931 a publicity pamphlet for the Compagnie Parisienne de Distribution d'Electricité – a collection of ten photographs entitled *Électricité* – aligns his interest in light with the concerns of modern society. It is only with the later *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, a film that forced him out of the studio and into a specific location in

the south of France, that Man Ray explored the creative potential of natural sunlight, presenting a kind of complement to the predominance of artificial light throughout his work in both film and photography.

The difference between the use of light and shadow in these two media is the element of movement, which allows Man Ray to further develop his photographic concerns. A discussion of *Emak Bakia* in *Paris Vu Par le Cinéma D'Avant Garde* places emphasis on Man Ray's experimentation with light and movement and describes a progression of concerns through the different sections of the film:

> "Un jeu de lumières, créé, grâce à la rotation à vitesse variable d'un prisme de cristal qui se reflète et se multiplie dans plusieurs miroirs installés sur le fond à cette fin. C'est un mouvement de lumières, programmé avec exactitude, qui répartit sur l'écran une trame organique et en quelque sorte géométrique de faisceaux lumineux. Le jeu de lumières se poursuit au plan suivant, mais sa configuration est sensiblement différente: elle n'opère plus en se dépliant avec ordre, mais mélange chaotiquement des sources de lumières différentes qui tournent dans l'espace rendues floues par un filtre ou une modification intentionnelle de la mise au point."[82]

Crucially, this description draws attention to the "movement of lights" and highlights the kinetic element of these sections by referring to the transformations of various light effects through time. This "play of light" is understood as having been made possible by the rotation of objects and the use of varying speeds to diversify the resulting visual impressions. This brief discussion of the film is one of the few instances in which light and movement are singled out as the central creative forces and analysed in terms of the formal structures created by them. As the statement suggests, light seems to play the most significant role in the film's abstract sequences, that is, where the image breaks completely with any concrete basis in reality. The important factor here is the inherently abstract and intangible nature of light itself, an aspect I have discussed in relation to *Le Retour à la raison* and to which I will return in subsequent chapters. In much of Man Ray's work, the very formlessness of light is thus contrasted with the more defined nature of the shadow, which is, in any case, an abstract rendering of the object from which it emanates.

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[82] Prosper Hillairet, Christian Lebrat, Patrice Rollet, *Paris vu par le cinéma d'avant-garde* (Paris: Paris Expérimental, 1985), p. 39.

Clearly then, the subject of light as an artistic tool raises important questions related to visual representation. In *Emak Bakia* these concerns are extensively developed; here light is not simply a tool for visual exploration but becomes the subject of the image itself. Whereas light in *Le Retour à la raison* is subordinated to creating complex formations that both disturb and enhance our vision of the object, *Emak Bakia* reverses this process so that it is no longer the object in which we are interested but the light impressions themselves. We can understand this process as painting with light, a term used also by Julien Levy in relation to Man Ray's photography and which provides an alternative but not altogether conflicting view to that of Tzara's.[83] What is important here is the use of light as material or matter and not simply as a means to achieving perception. The prismatic lenses and crystals used in *Emak Bakia* allow light to be reflected and creatively reformed into moving patterns that stimulate the eye through physiological responses. This represents one of the key ways in which the film can be distinguished from Surrealist concerns, despite Man Ray's attempt to align it with the principles of the movement.

Its historical, formal and thematic positioning within the movements of Dada and Surrealism make *Emak Bakia* Man Ray's most complex film. His work as an artist often seems to create a dialogue between the movements, seeming simultaneously to express different, even opposing concerns. It must be understood, however, that contradiction was a major impulse in Man Ray's life and became a vital creative tool, characterising virtually every area of his artistic output. That *Emak Bakia* resists easy interpretation was undoubtedly Man Ray's intention and it is the refusal to subscribe to any particular mode of expression that emerges as one of the strongest aspects of the film. It seems likely that rather than setting out to make a 'Dada film' or a 'Surrealist film', Man Ray allowed himself to be taken in whatever direction pleased him, drawing on his interests in Dada and Surrealist related vision but ultimately exploring beyond the confines of either doctrine. What defines the film more than anything are its visual diversity and juxtaposition of techniques, freely moving from the figural to the abstract, from the highly constructed to the purely improvised, from spatial definition to spatial ambiguity and from temporal progression to a sense of

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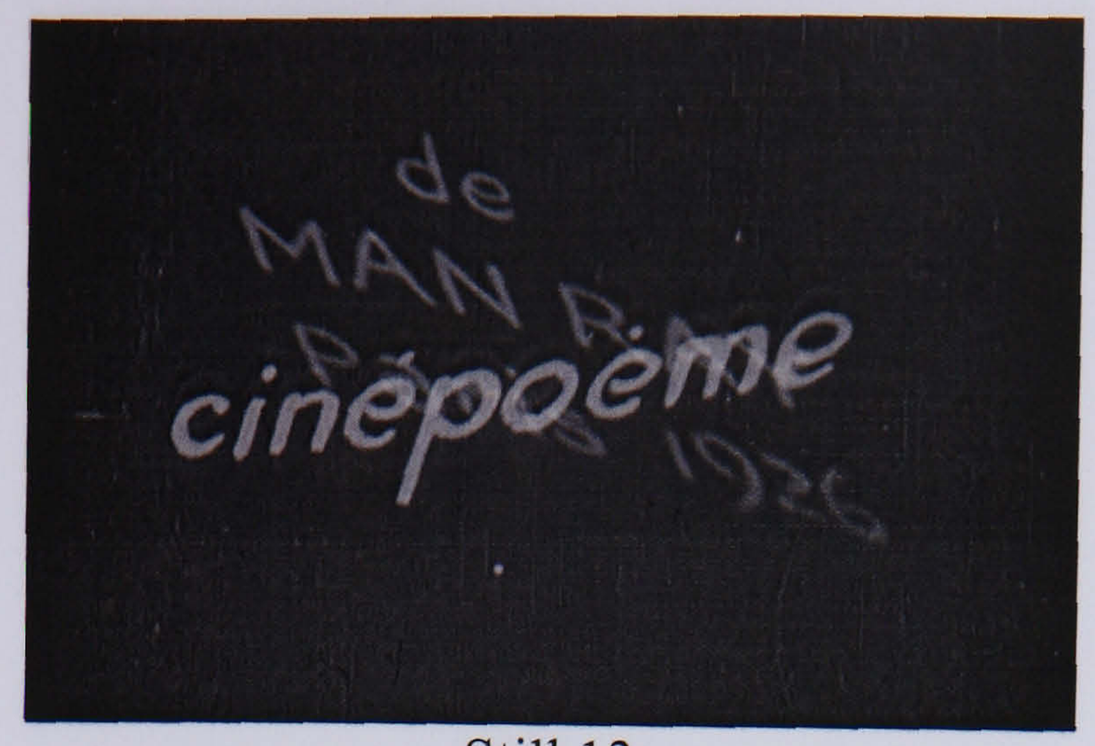
[83] Julien Levy, "Man Ray", in *Surrealism* (New York: The Black Sun Press, 1936), p. 22.

timelessness. Some of these elements are already present in *Le Retour à la raison* and I have discussed in relation to that film Man Ray's interest in the creative possibilities of similarity and contrast. *Emak Bakia* develops these principles further and explores the extent to which they create their own sense of structure from chaos and meaning from the seemingly meaningless.



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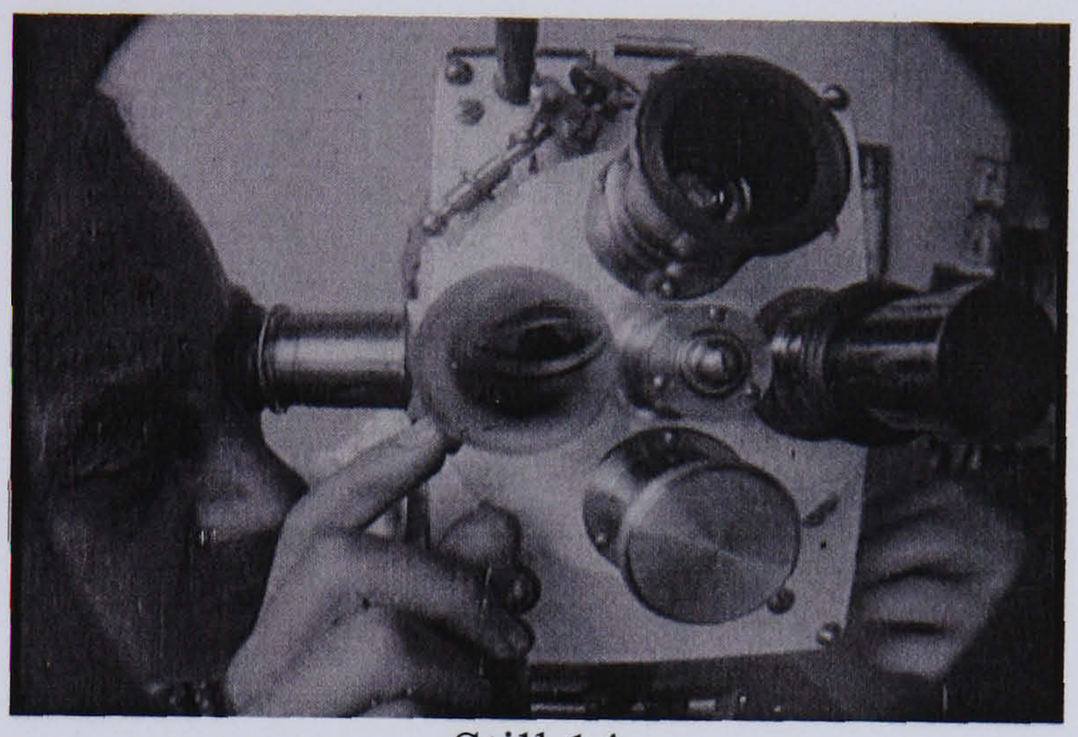

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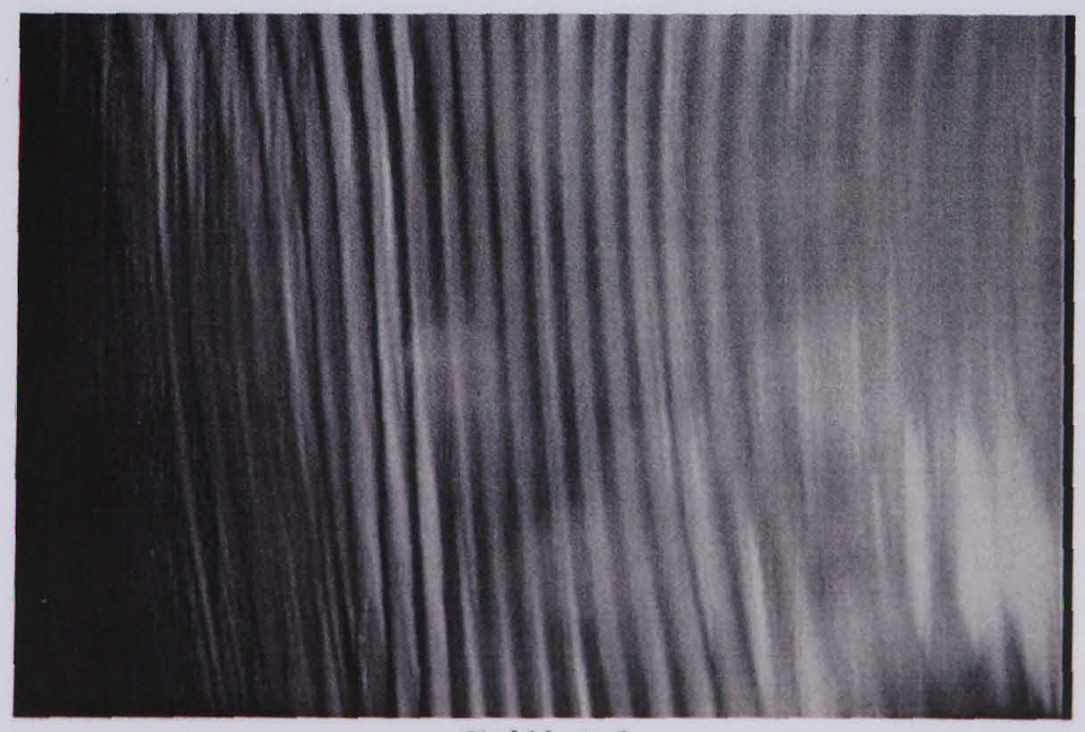

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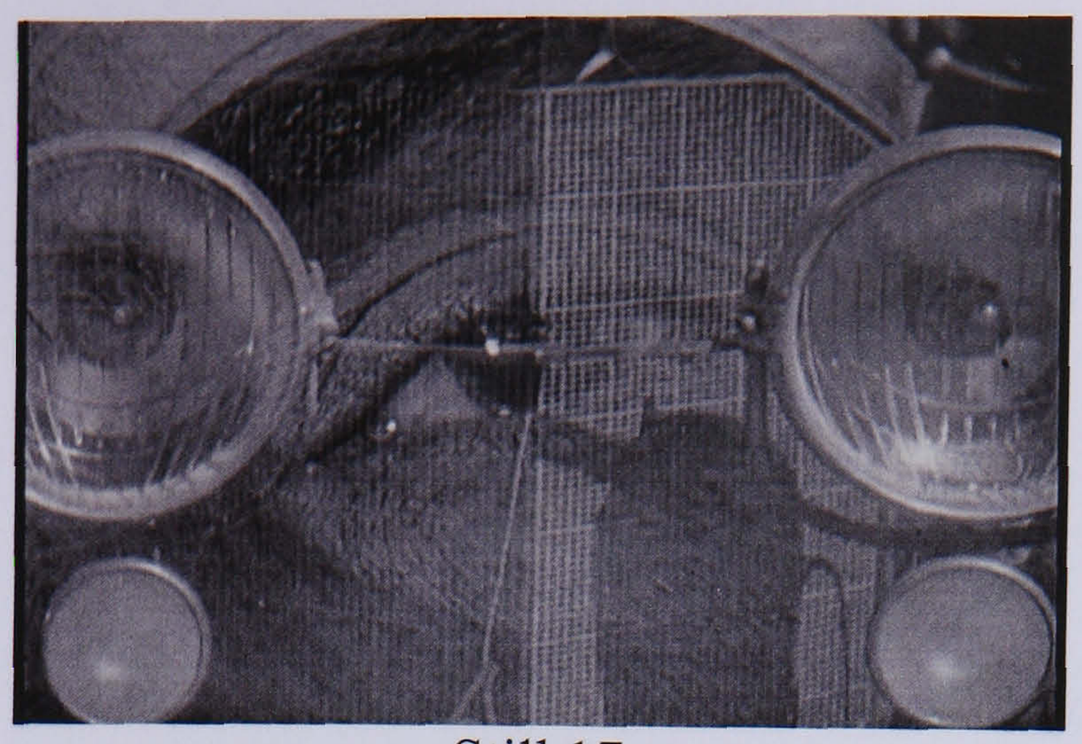

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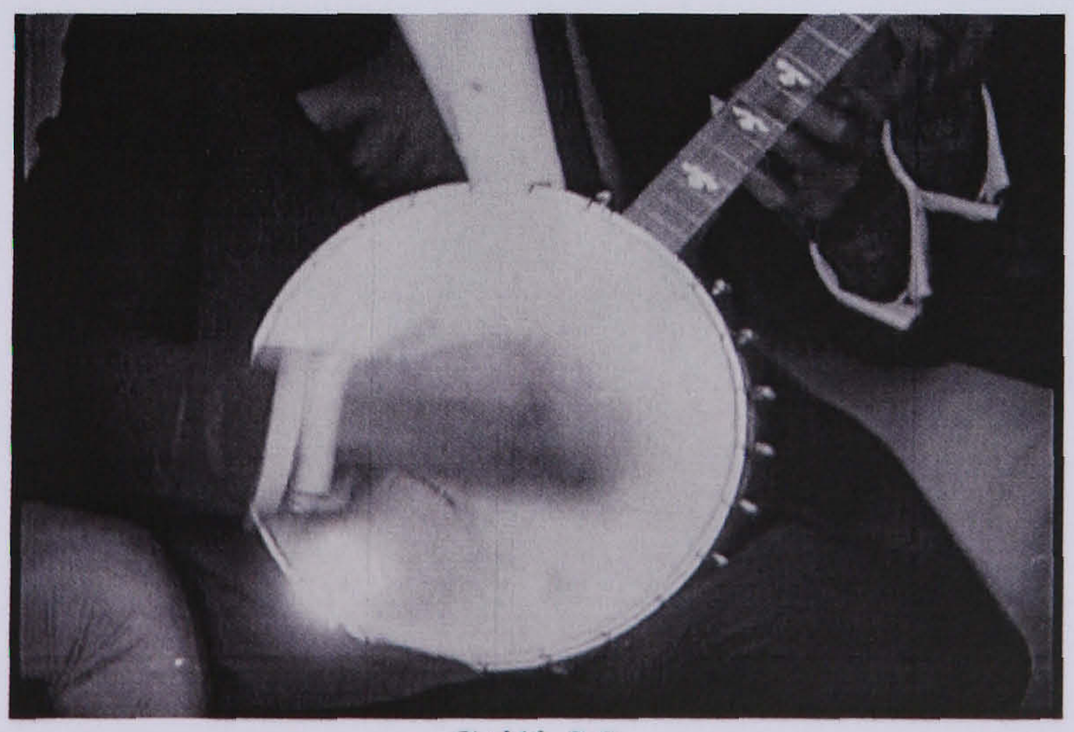

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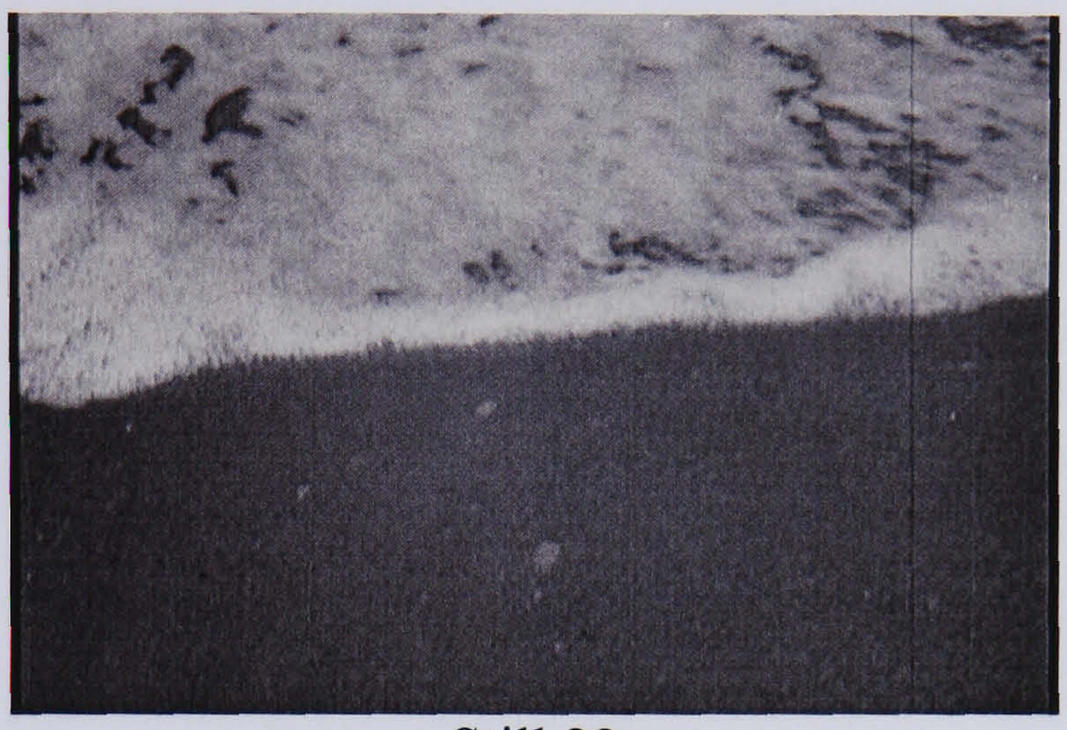

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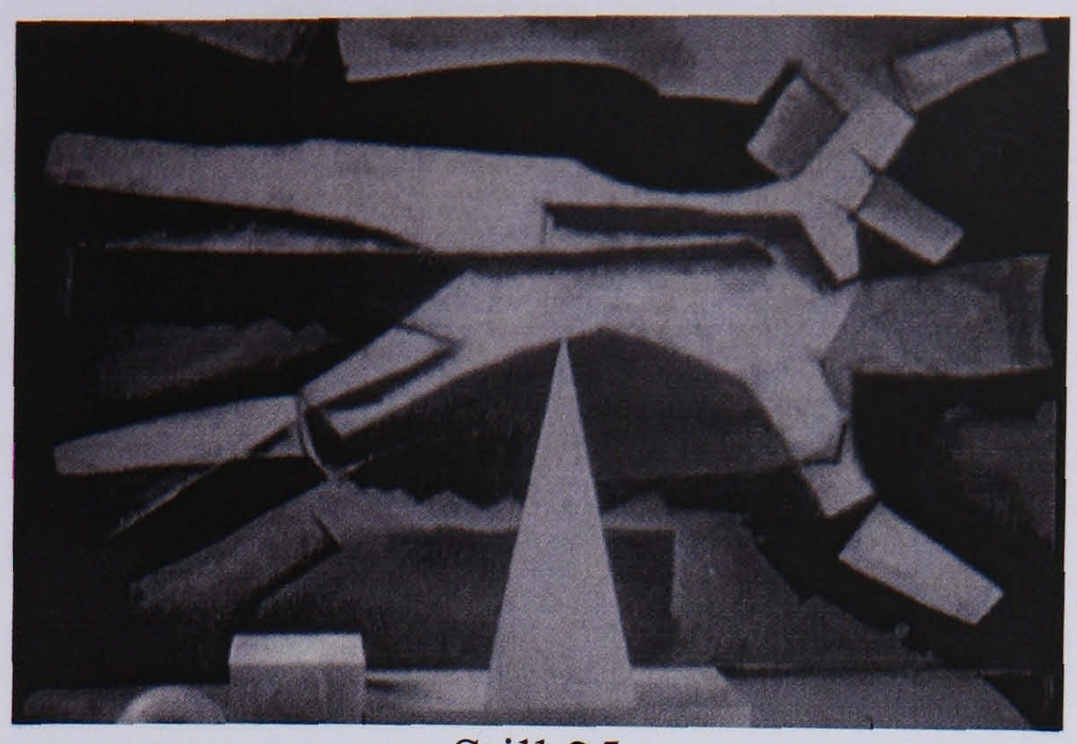

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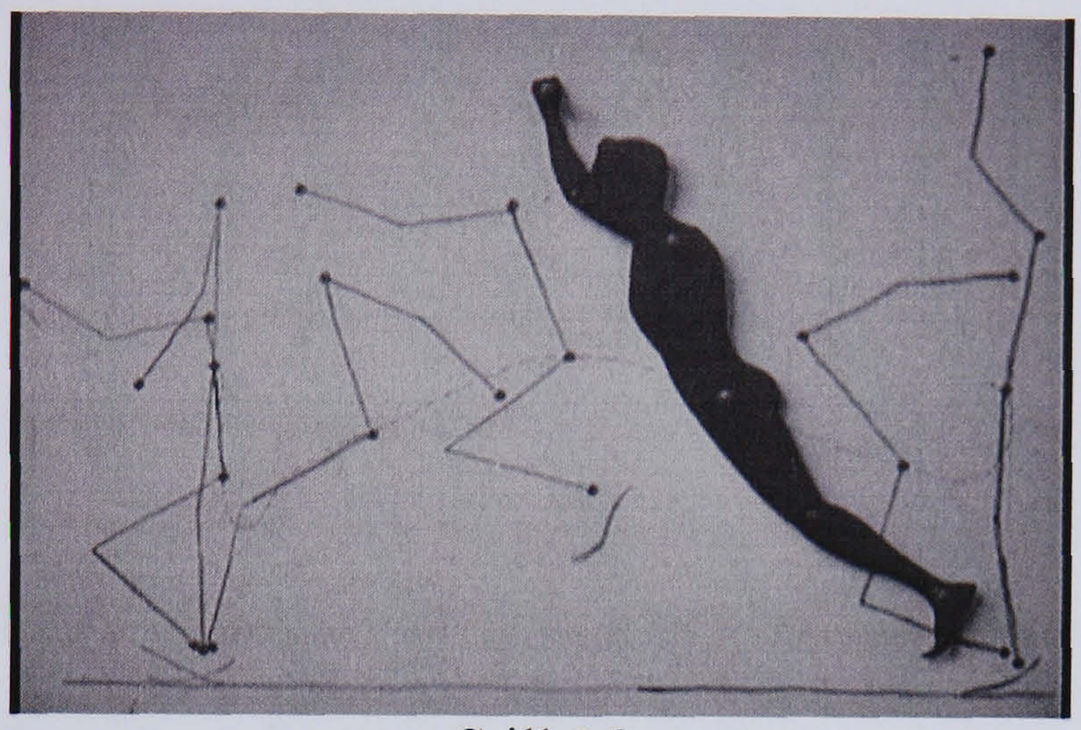

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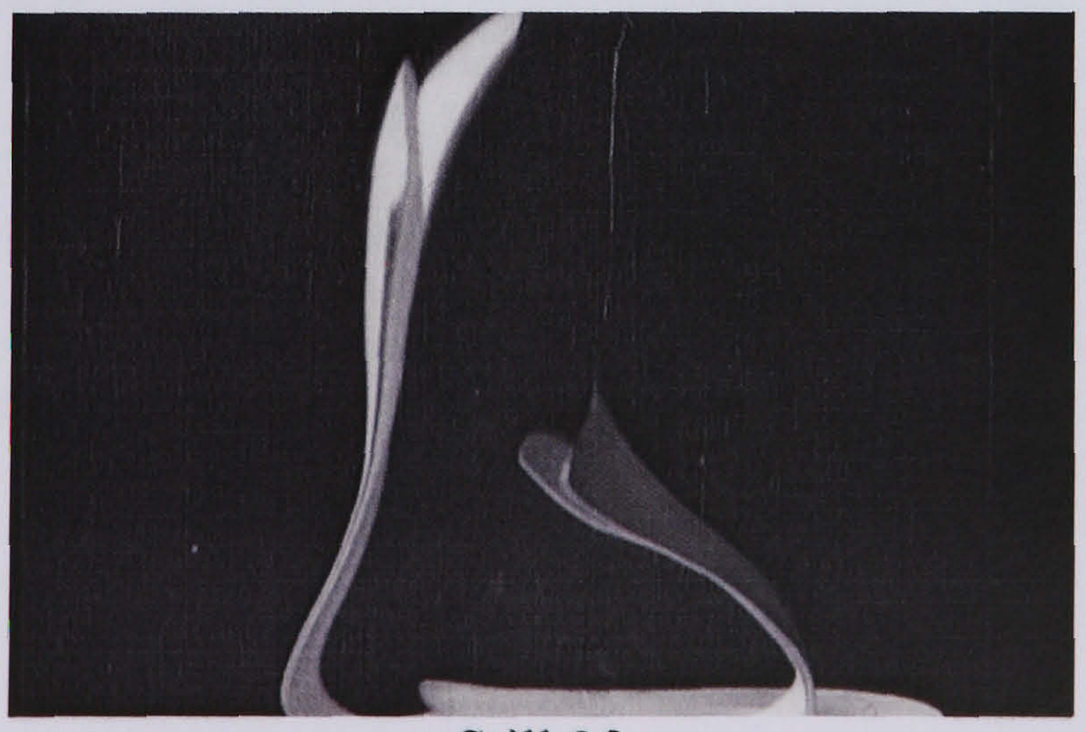

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CHAPTER THREE

The filmmaker and the poet: *L'Etoile de mer* (1928)

The history of avant-garde filmmaking is scattered with numerous examples of collaborative partnerships, often involving an element of interdisciplinary dialogue between film and other arts such as painting, photography and poetry. *Entr'acte* (1924) was the result of a collaboration between the painter Francis Picabia and the filmmaker René Clair, just as *Un Chien andalou* (1929) came into being through the combined artist sensibilities of Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. Germaine Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1927), although perhaps not such a harmonious collaboration, was made from a Surrealist scenario written by Antonin Artaud.[1] Man Ray's third film, *L'Etoile de mer* represents a similar combination of personalities and, in ways comparable to *La Coquille*, demonstrates the process by which visual ideas expressed in a literary domain are translated into images. The film is commonly held to be an adaptation of a poem by the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos and as such symbolises a particular relationship between literary and visual Surrealism and the desire to transfer certain methods of image creation used in poetry to the medium of film. As we shall see, the relationship between written poetry and visual poetry is one of the central concerns of *L'Etoile de mer*.

So, if *Emak Bakia* is considered as representing the intermediary stage between Dada and Surrealist expression, *L'Etoile de mer* is widely accepted as occupying more distinctly Surrealist terrain. It is often cited, along with the films of Buñuel and Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, as one of the few examples of early film Surrealism. The discussion of Man Ray's Dada sensibility that dominates

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[1] The collaboration between Dulac and Artaud caused much controversy, with Artaud stating that Dulac had gravely misunderstood his scenario in making a film that claimed to recount the content of a dream rather than representing its structure. In 1928 he wrote: "It is to show how far the scenario can resemble and ally itself with the mechanics of a dream without really being a dream itself, for example. It is to show how far the mind, left to itself and the images, infinitely sensitised, determined to lose nothing of the inspirations of subtle thought, is all prepared to return to its original functions, its antannae pointed towards the invisibe, to begin another resurrection from death." Cahiers de Belgique, no. 8. Translated and reprinted in Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works 3: Scenarios on the cinema, interviews, letters*, translated by Alistair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972). During the premiere screening of the film, the Surrealists protested by personally insulting Dulac and throwing objects at the screen. For a comprehensive discussion of the complex circumstances of this collaboration see Alain and Odette Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* (Paris: Seghers, 1976) and *Artaud-Dulac: La coquille et le clergyman: essai d'élucidation d'une querelle mythique* (Paris: Paris Expérimental, 2000).

accounts of his first two films is replaced by a more theoretically concerned concentration on the cinematic formulation of desire, focusing on the extensive use of symbolism and metonymic relations. The majority of analyses of *L'Etoile* therefore emphasise the relationships that are established by the imagery provided by Desnos and as such end up providing an exclusively Surrealist reading of the film. Lauren Rabinovitz for example highlights the predominance of Freudian symbolism, privileging specific moments that support such an interpretation and leaving aside those which express other, more visually determined concerns.[2] Allen Thiher, relates much of the film's imagery to the themes of eros and anti-eros, whilst P. Adams Sitney draws attention to the centrality of the 'toothed vagina' and the castrating woman to the development of the action.[3] Whilst I would not wish to deny the importance of these accounts in understanding the content of the film (the following discussion will draw on some of these interpretations), the emphasis tends to rest largely on the content of the film and neglects questions of form. This chapter aims to reconcile these two areas by looking more closely into the conception of the film and the very unique collaboration between Man Ray and Robert Desnos. The purpose of such an investigation is ultimately to create a more in depth understanding of the way *L'Etoile de mer* can be seen within the context of Man Ray's work as a filmmaker, but also to uncover some concerns that relate more generally to his wider artistic approach.

Of the four films by Man Ray, *L'Etoile* is the only one that did not emerge as the result of a request or commission, but one that was made, nonetheless, in response to an external stimulus. In *Self Portrait*, Man Ray describes the initial conception of the film during a dinner that was held to celebrate Desnos's departure to the West Indies on a journalistic mission. At the end of the meal, Desnos apparently began to recite various poems, one of which was his own and had a significant impact on Man Ray. It was, remembers Man Ray "like a scenario for a film, consisting of fifteen or twenty lines, each line presenting a clear, detached

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[2] Lauren Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman: Man Ray, Dada and Surrealist Film-Maker," *Southwest Review* no. 64, Autumn 1979.

[3] Allen Thiher, "Man Ray and the Limits of Metaphor," in his *The Cinematic Muse: Critical Studies in the History of French Cinema* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979); P. Adams Sitney, "The Instant of Love: Image and Title in Surrealist Cinema," in his *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

image of a place or of a man or a woman. There was no dramatic action, yet all the elements for a possible action [...] My imagination may have been stimulated by the wine during our dinner, but the poem moved me very much. I saw it clearly as a film – a Surrealist film."[4] That very evening he made a promise to Desnos that he would have a completed film by the time the latter returned to Paris. Despite subsequently regretting his impulsive decision, he set to work on the project the following day and did indeed have a finished version in time for Desnos's return. The account offered by Man Ray thus presents the film in terms of an individual effort and makes no reference to the process by which the poem was transformed into a film. Importantly, the role of Desnos is restricted to the poem itself and his presence in the final scene of the film, which was shot prior to his departure.

A number of critics have expressed their doubt in relation to the authenticity of Man Ray's claims. Allen Thiher, for instance, states that, "the existence of such a poem in a finished form is doubtful. Man Ray's description of the poem in *Self-Portrait* reads more like a résumé of his own film, and one might well suspect that, rather than a completed poem, Desnos gave him a certain number of themes, images and perhaps tropes that the photographer decided to transform into a film."[5] In a similar vein, J. H. Matthews writes: "If Desnos's poem was indeed only fifteen or twenty lines long as Man Ray tells us, it must have been a masterpiece of compression. As he recalls it [in his autobiography], Man Ray evidently is evoking all it suggested to him." Matthews also goes on to suggest, like Thiher, that Man Ray's description seems to be a "summary of the content" of the finished film rather than a description of the poem itself.[6] It would not be unusual for Man Ray, famous for his contempt for facts and details, to have distorted, either purposefully or not, the progression of events some thirty years after their having taken place. However, some recent discoveries shed light on the situation and allow a deeper understanding of the way in which the project was conceived by both Desnos and Man Ray. Whilst there is no existing evidence of the poem to which Man Ray refers in his autobiography[7], there are a number of original documents: a rough outline of the film

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[4] Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1998), p. 223-4.
[5] Allen Thiher, "Man Ray and the Limits of Metaphor," p. 38.
[6] J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 82.
[7] Links have previously been made between *L'Etoile de mer* and *La Place de l'étoile* written by Desnos in 1927 as a play in nine parts, later to be called re-edited as an "antipoem." Mary Ann Caws

held in the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris and accompanying musical indications in the Bibliothèque du film[8], as well as a more detailed scenario (**Figs. 14-19**), which, as Inez Hedges points out, has been in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art since 1972.[9] The fact, noted by Hedges, that the existence of these documents has gone largely unnoticed by previous commentators goes some way to understanding the general acceptance of Desnos simply providing Man Ray with a basic idea around which the latter structured his film. From this perspective, *L'Etoile* could easily be worked into Man Ray's statement: "Tous les films que j'ai réalisés ont été autant d'improvisations. Je n'écrivais pas de scénario. C'était du cinéma automatique. Je travaillais seul."[10]

The presence of the scenario, however, seriously throws into question these claims and initially seems to place *L'Etoile* somewhat at a distance from the rest of Man Ray's cinematic oeuvre, which for the most part is characterised by a spirit of improvisation that is combined with an overall compositional and structural unity. The detailed manuscript of the scenario, reproduced, transcribed and translated in Kuenzli's *Dada and Surrealist Film*, corresponds almost exactly with the finished film. It is divided into twenty-three sections that describe the succession of shots and inter-titles, next to which are added instructions for musical accompaniment. The most interesting aspect of these documents is that they appear to have been written, not by Man Ray, but by Desnos.[11] Notations added to the later manuscript in pencil have been established as in the hand of Man Ray. Rather than add to the content of the scenario, these revisions focus predominantly on the order of the images and were likely to have been made during the actual shooting of the film. This is suggested by the additional diagonal pencil marks that appear across each of the sections and which were probably made once a shot had been completed. As Hedges

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for example goes as far as to suggest that this text was the direct inspiration for the film, despite the very few resemblances between them. Caws, *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 28.

[8] Both reproduced with short commentaries in Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas (eds.) *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1997), p. 62-3.

[9] Inez Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer*." In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph E. Kuenzli (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 101.

[10] Man Ray, "Témoignages," in *Surrréalisme et cinéma*, special issue of *Etudes Cinématographiques*, nos. 38-39, 1965, p. 46.

[11] Inez Hedges explains that this recent discovery was made by comparing the writing with another manuscript by Robert Desnos from the same period, *The Night of the Loveless Nights*, also held at the Museum of Modern Art. In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph E. Kuenzli, p. 207.

L'étoile de mer — 1

Poëme de Robert Desnos

Mutique

Tel que l'a vu Man Ray

I

un homme et une femme dans la rue. Marche. Leurs jambes. Les jambes de la femme. Elle s'arrête c'est dans la rue! Elle ~~rey~~ ajuste sa jarretière. on voit sa jambe

"Plaisir d'amour"
uniquement la phrase correspondant aux paroles "plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un instant repris après un silence si nécessaire

II

Ils montent un escalier sombre. c'est le soir

"Dernier tango"

III

Sa chambre a coucher

IV

Elle se déshabille. Lui pas. Elle se couche. adieu. L'homme s'en va. La porte se ferme

Figure 14.

V

(2

Dans la rue. Une marchande de journaux c'est "elle"

musique

"Halleluyah"

1) Sous titre : (« qu'elle est belle »)

VI

~~La chambre~~
Le jeune homme suit la marchande de journaux qui l'entraine dans un coin sombre. Elle lui donne une étoile de mer dans un bocal

VII

La chambre de l'homme. Il regarde l'étoile de mer à travers la clarté d'une lampe.

le beau Danube bleu

2) Sous titre : « après tout »

VIII

Dans la rue,
Des journaux emportés par le vent. Il en attrape un. Un article où on lit "M*** " VI - VII

Figure 15.

IX

Un pot avec une fleur

3) Sous titre « si les fleurs étaient en verre »

X

Une série de verres de toutes formes et de toutes dimensions, de boules en verre et d'objets en verre

musique

dis " nous étions dix filles dans un pré, toutes les dix à marier y avait dîné y avait dîné de ..."

XI

L'homme à genoux devant la femme et la tête sur les genoux

Le tambourin de Ramazzotti

XII

Un train qui passe → "O sole mio"

XIII

Un bateau → Silence

XIV

Le même pot de fleur

4) Sous titre « si les fleurs étaient en verre »

La carmagnole en sourdine

Figure 16.

XV

La femme en bonnet phrygien, de la fumée, des feux, une rue désolée

4 musique

La Carmagnole très fort puis Alerte et en sourdine "O sole mio"

XVI

La femme presque déshabillée. Un pied sur un livre l'étoile de mer dans un coin

"O sole Mio"

XVII XV

La femme presque déshabillée. des bouteilles brisées autour d'elle d'où s'échappe du vin rouge. l'étoile de mer dans un coin

L'aria de Bach

XVIII

Une route. la femme toute seule

5 Sous titre « Belle, belle comme une fleur de verre » l'étoile de mer vient en surimpression.

Figure 17.

XIX

Le jeune homme joint ses deux mains.
l'étoile de mer dans un coin

XX

Les mains de l'homme. Les lignes
de ces mains marquées en
noir

XXI

Un ciel éclairé. La femme
monte un long couteau à
la main, l'étoile de mer sur
une marche

XXII une XIX

Le jeune homme. La femme
masquée devant lui.

XXIII

Elle retire son masque c'est elle.
Sous titre « Belle comme une fleur de chair »

5 L'aria de Bach la suite

Figure 18.

XXIV

Les mains de la Sante

XXV

Le mur. Le ciel étoilé

XXVI

La Seine ... qui coule

XXVII [sous-titre]

Une table. Un lit. Un verre à
demi plein. Une banane en
partie épluchée l'étoile de mer

XXVIII IV

La femme à genoux devant un
feu de bois
7 Sous titre « Belle comme une
fleur de feu

6 L'aria de Bach la suite

Figure 19.

remarks in her reassessment of the film from this perspective, what the scenario makes clear is that *L'Etoile* must be understood in terms of a collaborative effort, with Robert Desnos contributing to a much greater extent than has previously been acknowledged. His role should therefore not be relegated to simply providing the basic idea for the film but must be recognised as contributing significantly to the nature of the film in terms of both image and text.

Understanding *L'Etoile* in terms of collaboration not only privileges the position of Desnos, but also helps us to assess the film more accurately within Man Ray's cinematic oeuvre. As this chapter will demonstrate, many of the Surrealist themes and motifs that are developed throughout the film seem to derive from concerns quite specific to Desnos and can be seen as a recurring element in his work. The predominant themes of love, sexuality and violence form the basis of the majority of analyses of the film, and are rarely ascribed to a particular origin, leaving open the question of how these issues are supposed to relate to Man Ray's work more generally. In contrast, many of the film's formal intricacies are overlooked and, since it is through these qualities that Man Ray's artistic persona is most strongly evidenced, vital questions about the relationship between *L'Etoile* and Man Ray's development of specifically cinematic concerns are left unexplored. This chapter thus aims to provide a reassessment of the film that develops certain observations made by Hedges, to argue for the simultaneous presence of two distinct paths of expression: on the one hand the poetic Surrealist discourse of Desnos and on the other the exploration into the plastic qualities of the image characteristic of Man Ray. In some areas of the film these paths diverge, whilst in others there seems to be an element of convergence where, although not necessarily expressed in the same way, the artistic sensibilities of the two men can be seen working side by side. The examination of *L'Etoile* from the perspective of the combined forces of Man Ray and Robert Desnos also allows us to consider one of the most important issues in the field of Surrealist theory: the relationship between the word and the image.

Man Ray and Robert Desnos: a fusion of sensibilities

As the previous chapter highlights, although Surrealism emerged out of literature and was expressed predominantly through the medium of poetry, visual expression

became increasingly more important as the movement developed. The Surrealists seized upon the immediacy of the image and the seemingly direct path it led from the unconscious. Surrealist writers had always been inspired by the visual world around them and the influence of the cinema can be seen well before the movement was established. Many of them were avid cinema-goers (André Breton's account, in 'Comme dans un bois', of his random visits to the cinema with Jacques Vaché in 1917 is a perfect example of how film was used as a source of creative inspiration[12]) and several Surrealist authors began to publish scenarios and articles on the cinema in the late 1910s (Phillipe Soupault, Louis Aragon) and early 20s (Robert Desnos).[13] The artistic fusion of Man Ray and Robert Desnos is significant in this context, since it represents an exchange or dialogue between two key areas of Surrealist expression – the visual and the literary. It is interesting therefore to briefly explore the nature of this exchange and to outline their respective trajectories towards the making of *L'Etoile de mer*.

Man Ray and the written word

Although Man Ray was first and foremost a visual artist, his interest in poetry and the creative power of words had a considerable effect on his work. Much of his life was spent in the company of writers and poets, beginning with the years during which he lived in the artists' commune in Ridgefield and continuing with his acquaintances in both New York and Paris. He claims that during his early development as a painter, it was not the vast collection of modernist works that he saw at Alfred Steiglitz's gallery, 291, in New York that had the greatest impact on him, but rather the creative energy and ideas of a literary kind, both past and contemporary.[14] His first wife, the Belgian Adon Lacroix, was a writer and provided his initiation into the world of the French poets. He has on a number of occasions expressed the direct influence that these poets, especially Lautréamont and his use of juxtapositions, had on his artistic approach. *The Riddle*, or *The Enigma of Isidore*

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[12] See chapter two, p. 84.

[13] See J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*; Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Richard Abel, "Exploring the Discursive Field of the Surrealist Scenario Text." In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph Kuenzli.

[14] For his comments on the influence of writers on his artistic development, see Arturo Schwarz, "Interview with Man Ray: "This is Not for America"," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 51, May 1997 pp. 116-7.

Ducasse (1920) (**Fig. 20**), a photograph of an object or objects covered by carpet and bound with string, is a direct reference to this inspiration, and even constitutes the central theme of the work. As Francis Naumann observes, "Man Ray wanted the viewer to believe that two rather commonplace objects were hidden under the carpet. The only way a viewer could know what they were, though – and thus solve the riddle – was to have been familiar with the writings of the obscure, though extremely influential, French author Isidore Ducasse, whose pseudonym was the Comte de Lautéamont."[15] Man Ray's work in the visual domain has often been placed alongside works of a literary nature, either in journals such as *La Révolution Surréaliste* or in collaborative publications, such as the *Book of Divers Writings* that he published with Lacroix and *Les Mains Libres*, a collection of drawings with accompanying poems by Paul Eluard, published in 1937. In Ridgefield, he collaborated with the painter Samuel Halpert and poet Alfred Kreymborg on the publication of *The Glebe*, a home-grown magazine intended to rival the Chicago-based Imagist publication *Poetry*. He was also involved in the *Others* magazine, headed by the poet, art patron and collector, Walter Arensberg.[16]

Man Ray was particularly aware of the potentially powerful relationship between image and text. The Amory Show of 1913 and the scandal caused by Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* helped to shape his understanding of how the two artistic domains could collide in such a way as to alter the viewer's perspective and thus their interpretation of the work. He has argued that one of the most important aspects of Duchamp's painting is the title given to it, without which it would not have attracted so much attention. He states: "L'incident m'avait ouvert les yeux et j'ai par la suite donné un titre à chacune de mes oeuvres. Elles ne sont certes pas expliquées par les mots qui leur ajoutent cependant un "élément littéraire", pour ainsi dire, et agissent sur la pensée comme un stimulant."[17] Thus, in many of his art works he uses the title to alter the meaning or to create a collision of signification. To return to *Self Portrait* (1916), discussed in chapter two, the title of this work is of

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[15] Francis Naumann, "Man Ray, 1908-1921: From an Art in Two Dimensions to the Higher Dimension of Ideas." In: *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 80-1.
[16] Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), p. 32-46.
[17] Man Ray in an interview with Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper, "Camera-Interview," *Camera*, vol. 54, February 1975, p. 37.

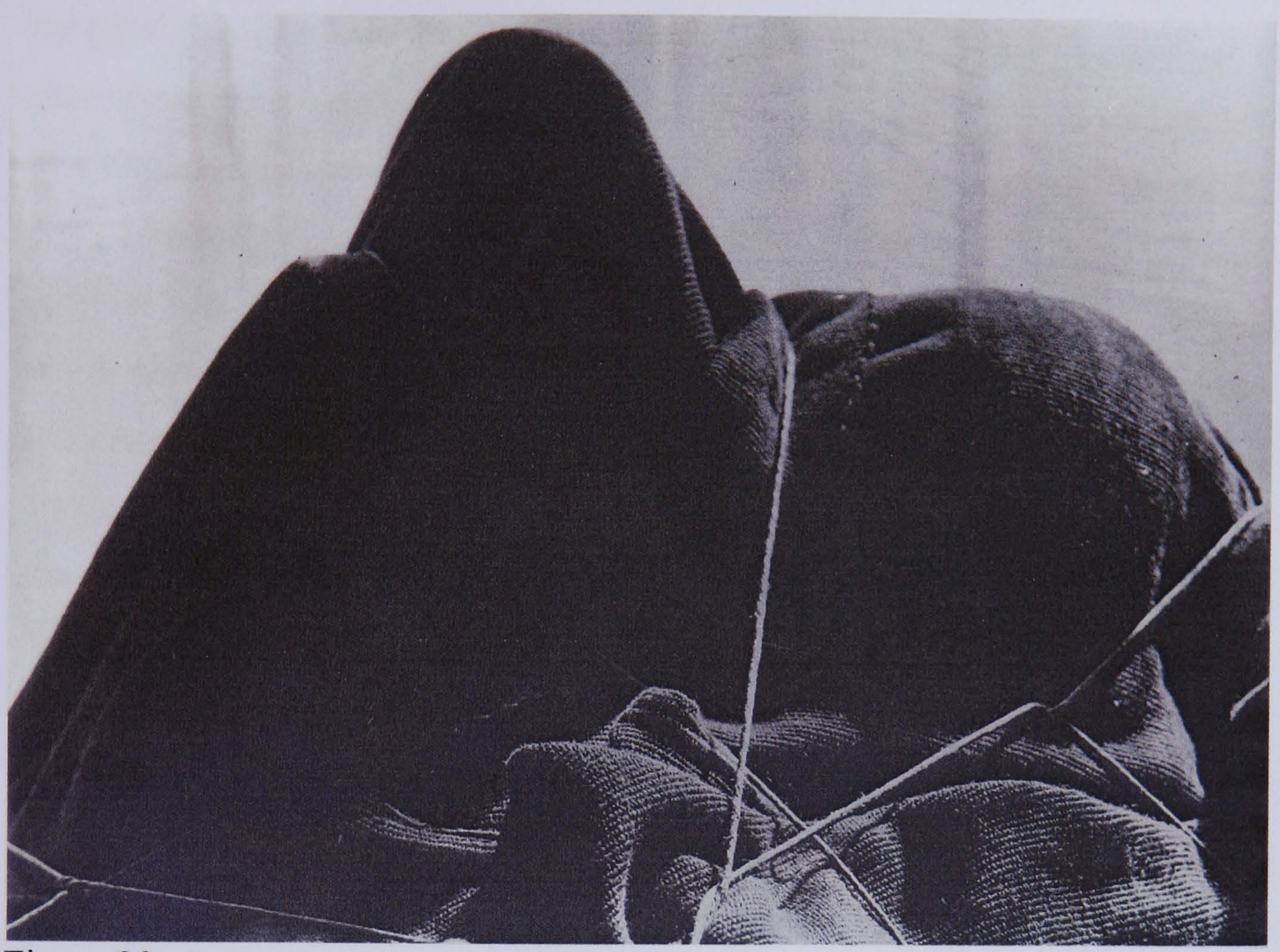

Figure 20.

central importance since, contrary to what it suggests, the "construction" of mixed media does not even feature his face, but a hand print in the middle of an arrangement of elements designed to provoke the public. I have suggested in the previous chapter that by calling the work a self-portrait, Man Ray simultaneously challenges expectations whilst drawing attention to himself as the creator and thus the provoker. *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself With Her Shadows* of the same year is another example of text entering into a relationship with the image. The title gives figurative meaning to what would otherwise be seen as an abstract work.

Man Ray's literary interests are revealed on a number of levels in his films. In chapter one, I have suggested a correlation between the visual relationships developed in *Le Retour à la raison* and the poetic structures found in the writings of the Dadaists and Surrealists described by Eric Sellin as repetition and parallel, converse and contradictory pairings of images.[18] The similarities found by comparing the content of his early films with the syntactical structures of poets such as Breton, Tzara, Aragon, Arp, Soupault, Reverdy and, of course, Desnos, demonstrate an affinity with certain poetic methods in the creation of images through time. These structures are also a key characteristic of *Emak Bakia* and reappear to a certain extent in *L'Etoile de Mer* and *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé*. In his films Man Ray thus establishes a visual 'language' where relationships are developed on the level of the signifier, suppressing the traditional reliance on the signified for the development of structures of meaning. The titles of these films also reveal an interest in linguistic structures on a very basic level of alliteration, itself a form of repetition. The phrase "le retour à la raison" works with elements of repetition and alternation, two salient features of the film's visual content. We could take this very simple observation slightly further to bring in Sellin's notion of the "echoic,"[19] in which repetition is altered slightly since the 'le re' of the first part of the title becomes 'la rai' in the latter, demonstrating a clear phonetic relationship. 'Emak Bakia' illustrates a similar process with the 'ak' being repeated in a different form from one word to the next.

Man Ray's desire to inject poetic structures into visual expression can also be seen in his decision to give *Emak Bakia* the subtitle 'ciné-poème', a feature that self-

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[18] See Eric Sellin, "Le chapelet du hazard": Ideas of Order in Dada-Surrealist Imagery," discussed in chapter one.
[19] Ibid, p. 29.

consciously points to the nature and arrangement of the images in terms of poetry. Indeed, Man Ray refers to the intended effect of his films in the light of emotional responses related to poetry. He imagines the spectator "to rush out and breathe the pure air of the outside, be a leading actor and solve his own dramatic problems. In that way he would realize a long cherished dream of becoming a poet, an artist himself, instead of being merely a spectator. Poets have declared that everyone should write poetry. All art is the writing of poetry and the painting of pictures."[20] Carl I. Belz argues that Man Ray's films constitute a personal "writing of poetry," stating that this element provides the common ground between them.[21] Interestingly, to demonstrate this idea, Belz draws on exactly the kinds of elements to which Sellin refers, without directly associating them with corresponding poetic structures. He emphasises for example features of similarity, alternation and the play of opposing elements that thread their way through all the films, particularly those of real/unreal and reality/fantasy that, as we shall see, are crucial to the structure of *L'Etoile*. Poetry was also an inspiration for *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, the film in which Man Ray most effectively demonstrates the interrelationship between modernist forms of literature and cinema.

Robert Desnos and the cinema

Desnos was one of the key members of the Surrealist group until growing tensions between him and André Breton led to their eventual estrangement at the end of the 1920s. He regularly participated in the Surrealists' early experiments into automatism during which the subject would go into a dream-like trance and utter words and thoughts apparently released from all logic and rationality. He was particularly gifted in this area, falling quickly into a kind of waking sleep and producing the most striking results. Man Ray was clearly impressed by Desnos's personal embodiment of the Surrealist principles, stating in his autobiography:

> In his normal state he was unpredictable, one moment gentle and urbane, then again suddenly violent and vindictive towards some act of injustice or stupidity. He'd give free rein to his passions in public gatherings, exposing himself to a beating by some outraged neighbor. Often in my studio, he'd

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[20] Man Ray, quoted in Carl I. Belz, "The Film Poetry of Man Ray," *Criticism*, Spring 1965, p. 119.
[21] Belz, "The Film Poetry of Man Ray," p. 119.

> slump down in an armchair and doze peacefully for a half-hour. Opening his eyes, he continued an interrupted conversation as if there had been no time lapse. It was a perfect illustration of one of the Surrealist maxims: there was no dividing line between sleep and the state of being awake.[22]

It was clearly the powerful fusion of these two states that led to Desnos's interest in the cinema. During the 1920s he wrote articles on various aspects of the medium for newspapers, magazines and journals such as *Paris-Journal*, *Le Soir* and *Journal Littéraire*. Although these texts clearly fit into the context of film criticism, he stated in 1923: "Je me suis toujours efforcé de ne pas faire de critique."[23] Interestingly, this proclamation seems to anticipate a very similar statement by Man Ray to which I have already drawn attention in the introductory chapter, "J'ai résolu de ne jamais m'occuper du cinema."[24] Both men draw attention to the desire to maintain a certain distance from film as a commercial undertaking and to not become actively involved in an art form that nonetheless fascinated them. Through his writings Desnos expressed a wide-ranging interest in the cinema and clearly valued its Surrealist qualities. He also wrote a number of scenarios, none of which actually made it into production, but which, taken together, establish a developed understanding of cinematic expression. His position can be defined in relation to the belief, shared by many artists and writers of the period and discussed in the previous chapter, that film is capable of recreating the dream experience through its characteristic ability to evoke both reality and illusion. Linda Williams highlights this aspect of his approach to cinema:

> A true Surrealist, Desnos refuses to consider the film as simply another art form, an object of contemplation endowed with aesthetic virtues [...] he prefers to model the film upon the dream's function of wish-fulfilment, as a mirror reflecting our desires rather than what is. For Desnos the heroes of film would ideally act out the spectator's own repressed desires, daring to commit the crimes they are too timid to commit themselves.[25]

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[22] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 223.
[23] Robert Desnos, "La Morale du Cinéma," first published in Paris-Journal, May 13 1923 and reprinted in *Cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), a collection of scenarios, synopses and articles by Desnos, p. 110.
[24] Man Ray in Pierre Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1972), p. 67.
[25] Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*, p. 23-4.

During the 1920s and 1930s a number of Surrealists turned their attention to film writing, producing a plethora of film poems, synopses and scenarios. As Richard Abel has noted, many of these "hybrid textual forms" were un-filmable and never actually made it to the screen.[26] They did however develop a richly diverse area of Surrealist expression that draws on the possibilities of cinematic expression through textual description. Along with Blaise Cendrars and Pierre Reverdy, Desnos was particularly prolific in this area, producing cinematic outlines in a range of formats. The most interesting of these in the context of the present discussion are the published scenarios dating from 1925 to 1933, which, taken together, demonstrate his approach to Surrealist expression in film. If Desnos was interested in using the medium of film as a way of transmitting the dream experience, *Minuit à quatorze heures* (1925), *Les Récifs de l'amour* (1930) and *Les Mystères du métropolitain* (1930) all reveal this concern to lie not within its form but its content, focusing on the representation of desire.

The principle point of convergence in the approaches of Man Ray and Robert Desnos towards the cinema would appear to lie in the use of iconography to build towards a specific idea or effect. As the previous chapter should have made clear, *Emak Bakia* abounds with references to eyes, legs and water. Certain images reappear from one film to the next, such as the dice that provide the focal point in *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé*, or, most obviously, the image of the starfish that is briefly referred to in the same film. In Desnos's scenario for *Minuit à quatorze heures*, the circular image, which appears in a variety of guises, gradually becomes a menacing force, finally literally consuming the narrative and the characters within it. Whilst this element of the scenario points, as Linda Williams has suggested, to an underlying interest in formal similarities typical of later Surrealist film (e.g., the eye-moon analogy in *Un Chien andalou*),[27] there is also something quite significant, almost symbolic, about Desnos's conception of the threatening, all-consuming form that ultimately destroys the narrative and the characters within it, bringing it to a violent and abrupt end. This becomes particularly relevant when we come to consider

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[26] Richard Abel, "Exploring the Discursive Field of the Surrealist Scenario Text." In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph Kuenzli, p. 67.
[27] Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*, p. 27.

the interaction between Desnos and Man Ray in the making of a film that seems to be caught between thematic and formal concerns.

Collaboration on 'L'Etoile de mer'

The exact nature of the collaboration between Man Ray and Desnos is unclear. As we have seen, Man Ray makes no reference to the scenario in his discussions of the film and always considered his cinematic works in terms of an individual effort. This can be seen as part of a more general reluctance to put his work under more than one name. Man Ray often expressed his distaste for collaborative projects, giving this as one of the main reasons for his lack of interest in filmmaking on a larger scale. This attitude also characterises his relations with both the Dada and Surrealist groups with whom he was happy to be associated as long as he maintained his artistic independence. That the manuscript of the scenario can be traced to the hand of Desnos thus raises important questions related to authorship. Was the scenario worked out together by the two men or was it purely the work of Desnos, whose ideas were simply translated into images by Man Ray? On the subject of the film's conception, Desnos has stated:

> Je possède une étoile de mer (issue de quel océan?) achetée chez un brocanteur juif de la rue de Rosiers et qui est l'incarnation même d'un amour perdu, bien perdu et dont, sans elle, je n'aurais peut être pas gardé le souvenir émouvant. C'est sous son influence que j'écrivis, sous la forme propice aux apparitions et aux fantômes d'un scénario, ce que Man Ray et moi reconnûmes comme un poème simple comme l'amour, simple comme le bonjour, simple et terrible comme l'adieu. Man Ray seul pouvait concevoir les spectres qui, surgissant du papier et de la pellicule, devaient incarner, sous les traits de mon cher André de la Rivière et de l'émouvante Kiki, l'action spontanée et tragique d'une aventure née dans la réalité et poursuivie dans le rêve. Je confiai le manuscrit à Man et partis en voyage. Au retour, le film était terminé. Grâce aux opérations ténébreuses par quoi il a constitué une alchimie des apparences, à la faveur d'inventions qui doivent moins à la science qu'à l'inspiration, Man Ray avait construit un domaine qui n'appartenait plus à moi et pas tout à fait à lui.[28]

The account by Desnos only adds to the ambiguity surrounding the film. It is almost impossible to discern whether the original idea was written in the form of a poem or

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[28] Robert Desnos, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Quarto, Gallimard, 1999), p. 426.

a scenario and to what extent Desnos and Man Ray actually worked together on the details of the film. This is due to the simultaneously evocative and evasive language used by Desnos that, perhaps purposefully, creates an aura of mystery. Whilst he does not directly refer to the writing of a scenario, he does suggest that his literary expression evoked cinematic images and patterns and was probably written with this in mind. The line "what Man Ray and I saw as a poem simple like love" neither confirms nor denies the presence of an actual poem since the sentence can be read from two different perspectives: that Man Ray and Desnos recognised a simplicity in the poem or that they saw a simple form of poetry in the written document (whatever form it may have taken).

We can make yet further observations about this comment. In describing the transformation of the film from page to screen, Desnos refers to "ghosts" and "spectres," bringing to mind a characteristic of the cinema to which he was particularly attracted. "You die and yet your doubles captured in the fragility of the celluloid survive you and continue to carry out your ephemeral actions," he states. "The projection does not stop at the screen. It goes beyond it, and ever-increasing, continues to infinity like two mirrors reflecting each other."[29] The paradoxical presence/absence phenomena can also be detected in Man Ray's films. As I have already discussed, the rayograph technique that features in both *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia* highlights this duality, as does the focus on light and shadow, an aspect that seems to form the basis of Man Ray's work in both cinema and photography more generally. We can also find, in *Emak Bakia* and *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, moments that seem to correspond with Desnos's observations about the relationship between cinema and reality. In the former, a sequence of numerous pairs of feet stepping out of a car uses the technique of superimposition to give an impression of ghostly presence. *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, as I will discuss in the next chapter, draws more directly on this theme, presenting it both visually and through written inter-titles. Desnos's approach to the cinema in terms of its ghostly characteristics and his reference to the effect of the mirror can be linked also to an area of film theory that has had a significant impact on the understanding of Surrealism and the cinema – Christian Metz's notion of the 'imaginary signifier', i.e.,

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[29] Robert Desnos, quoted in Williams, Figures *of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*, p. 23.

that cinema presents us with an image of something that is not really there.[30] One final remark should be made about Desnos's account of the film – the way he presents the film as existing in between the expressive domain of both himself and Man Ray but ultimately belonging to neither one of them. It is this aspect of the film that I shall now explore in detail, through an analysis of the relationship between the scenario and the film.

From page to screen

A close consideration of the scenario for *L'Etoile de Mer* reveals a number of important details that shed light on the collaborative relationship between Man Ray and Robert Desnos. The first and perhaps most important observation is that it contains very few technical references, focusing instead on a predominantly literary description of the film's action. The main detail that signals Desnos as the principle author of the text lies in the laconic and elliptic style of writing. The text describes the content through a series of tableaux, which present a simple action, image or location. This style also characterises other scenarios by Desnos discussed earlier. Placed alongside the scenario by Antonin Artaud for *La Coquille et le clergyman* of the same period, the difference in style is remarkably evident. Artaud's scenario is written as a narrative and describes the progression of events in detail.[31] In the scenario for *L'Etoile de Mer* however, the content is reduced to purely visual cues, with little indication about the relationship between the images themselves. Although, like Artaud, Desnos does not specify elements such as framing and transition between the shots, there is nonetheless a particularly cinematic feel to the scenario that arises from the simplicity with which the images are described. The inclusion of inter-titles is extremely significant since it demonstrates the positioning of the film in relation to traditional cinematic conventions, according to which the inter-title functions to supply the viewer with additional information or to comment on the visual action. Inter-titles are generally subordinate to the images and work alongside them to create narrative consistency and are a key feature of silent cinema. However, as P. Adams Sitney has pointed out, the role of the inter-title became a key

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[30] Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen*, number 16, Summer 1975.
[31] See Artaud, *Collected Works 3: Scenarios on the cinema, interviews, letters*, p. 19-25.

concern during the 1920's, when a number of filmmakers purposely omitted them.[32] A common view, particularly amongst the Impressionist filmmakers and theorists, was that inter-title was fundamentally 'uncinematic' since it emphasised the literary over the visual. Louis Delluc, for example argued: "Le texte, redisons-le, ne doit pas être là quand l'image peut le remplacer. On abuse du sous-titre. Cela gêne le mouvement – et le spectateur."[33] In 1923, Robert Desnos published an article on the subject, counter-arguing for the importance of the inter-title in film. Expressing a view that opposes the purist approach of the Impressionists, this article focuses on text as an integral part of cinematic expression and not simply a superficial addition, stating: "C'est qu'en effet tout ce qui peut être projeté sur l'écran appartient au cinéma, les lettres comme les visages."[34] Indeed, this stance is reflected in a number of avant-garde films made during the 1920s, in which text is incorporated and experimented with in a variety of ways. Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* is perhaps the best example of the way text is brought into a relation with the images, whilst at the same time retaining an autonomous function. The earlier *Ballet Mécanique* also uses text as a basis for visual exploration, reflecting the language dissection strategies used by the Dadaists, particularly in Germany.

When assessing the importance of the inter-title to Man Ray's filmmaking practice, we must again consider the more general status of text in his work. As I have already discussed, Man Ray often uses titles in his work to destabilise the viewing process, juxtaposing word and image so that the title becomes an integral part of the overall meaning and not simply a descriptive accompaniment. This process can be seen in his first film, *Le Retour à la raison*, where the title functions in a number of ways. Seen in terms of a Dada statement, it juxtaposes the promise of reason with its very opposite. Yet, as chapter one argues, *Le Retour à la raison* is about much more than simple negation and despite the spirit of anarchy that exists at its surface, the film expresses a strong creative urge through the development of purely visual structures. According to Sitney, "The "return to reason" of the title

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[32] P. Adams Sitney, "The Instant of Love: Image and Title in Surrealist Cinema." In his *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 21.
[33] Louis Delluc, quoted in Noureddine Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1995), p. 195.
[34] Robert Desnos, "Musique et sous-titres," first published in *Paris Journal*, 13 April 1923 and reproduced in *Cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 98.

might be taken as a declaration that cinema is fundamentally a play of light on surface. After almost thirty years of cinema, here was a film that returned to the theoretical starting point of the medium, taking account of its possibility as an art."[35] Regardless of the position taken in relation to this film, it is clear that the title goes beyond that of accompaniment to or description of the material since it enters into a relationship with the images and forms part of the film's central message. Although *Emak Bakia* is the first film in which Man Ray makes use of the inter-title, attempts to incorporate text into the visual ensemble can already be seen in *Le Retour à la raison* through the almost imperceptible flashes of writing. The words, written directly onto the film strip and lasting only a number of frames, are emptied of any significance and turned into visual impressions since the period of time for which they remain on the screen is far less than would be required for the spectator to recognise the words and incorporate them into a linguistic understanding. Only one inter-title is used in *Emak Bakia* and it has almost the same function as that of the title of *Le Retour à la raison*. The idea of reason and logic is evoked, only to be juxtaposed with a sequence that transcends any narratively logical explanation, suggesting that behind the normal laws of rationality exists another world of purely visual relationships. Man Ray's final film *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* is, like *L'Etoile de Mer*, characterised by an abundance of inter-titles that interact with and comment on the visual content in a number of different ways. The similarity between these two films on the level of the role played by textual inserts raises important questions about Man Ray's interest in the cinematic possibilities of the written word.

We can therefore detect in *L'Etoile*, a certain overlap of interests. However, in order to gain a deeper insight into the way the film expresses the concerns of both Robert Desnos and Man Ray, we must explore the relationship between the scenario and the finished film. If Desnos was the author of the scenario, what conclusions can be drawn from Man Ray's adaptation of it?

Man Ray's interpretation of the scenario

Turning from the scenario to the film in its finished form, we can now assess the way in which these concerns become concrete visual material. The film opens with the

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[35] Sitney, "The Instant of Love: Image and Title in Surrealist Cinema," p. 21.

rotating image of a starfish, confirming the importance of the title 'L'Etoile de Mer' in establishing the central motif (**Still 29**). The distorted quality of this shot demonstrates a clear link with sections of *Emak Bakia* and it is likely that Man Ray employed the same visual technique in both films. The isolation of the object against a black background is also reminiscent of the visual studies that characterise the earlier film. In fact, the closing shot of *Emak Bakia* (**Still 28**), in which the upside-down face of Kiki swings and rotates is almost seamlessly continued in this opening section of *L'Etoile de mer*. This is an early indication that Man Ray, despite working from a Surrealist text, had not abandoned his own visual concerns and was, crucially, still employing some of the techniques that he had developed in his previous film. The next shot introduces the film in terms of the Man Ray/Desnos partnership, exactly as it features in the scenario manuscript: "L'etoile de mer, poëme [sic] de Robert Desnos tel que l'a vu Man Ray." (**Still 30**) Unlike the initial presentation of the title, which appears in large anonymous typography, this text is handwritten and presented in very much the same format as in the scenario. This time, however, the text appears to have been written by Man Ray and not, as is the case with the original manuscript, by Desnos. The juxtaposition between the two forms of textual presentation, that is, the standard typography of film titles and the handwritten text continues throughout the film and represents one of the many examples of duality. The appearance of this introductory text in handwritten form creates a kind of authorial statement, since it clearly suggests the hand of the artist and can thus be seen alongside the opening shot of *Emak Bakia* in which Man Ray films himself operating his camera, as well as the sections of film in *Le Retour à la raison* onto which he wrote directly. The variation in the presentation of text in the film – the lack of consistency in the presentation of different styles and fonts, typed inter-titles and handwritten ones – looks ahead to the use of Stéphane Mallarmé's groundbreaking poem as inspiration for Man Ray's next film, further demonstrating his interest in the use of text as a visual element.

A panelled window opens out towards the camera suggesting a symbolic entry into the story world of the film, in which is developed the action described in the scenario. A man and a woman (Kiki and André de la Rivière) are presented in a long shot walking towards the camera along what appears to be a country lane. As

they approach, the shot changes to show their legs in close-up, walking together in synchronicity (**Still 31**). This clearly demonstrates Man Ray's visualisation of Desnos's brief explanations "Marche" and "leurs jambes." Indeed, as I shall discuss later, the staccato rhythm created by Desnos's literary style is effectively mirrored in the visual rhythm that is fleetingly established through these transitions. The image returns to a medium-shot of the couple as they stop in front of the camera. The woman bends down and a dissolve reveals a shot of her legs. The first inter-title states, "Les dents des femmes sont des objets si charmants …" The same image returns and the woman lifts up her skirt slightly to adjust her garter, kicking her leg forward in a playful, almost sexual manner. The sentence ends, "qu'on ne devrait les voir qu'en rêve ou à l'instant de l'amour." Thus the film begins with a powerful juxtaposition of image and text, subverting the conventional use of inter-titles to reinforce and compliment what is presented visually. Instead of creating consistency, the inter-title provides an incongruous comment on the previous scene. The image of the leg corresponds to Desnos's indication, "on voit sa jambe," but the added text suggests another layer of meaning that is not present at the corresponding stage in the scenario, which involves a simple erotic allusion in the image of the woman's leg. As many discussions of the film point out, this allusion is taken further by associating female sexuality with teeth, giving rise to the image of the toothed vagina and the castrating female. This is often seen as the film's central theme, providing a framework from which other sections can be understood.

The origin of these inter-titles and, by extension, the association that is made through the juxtaposition of image and text has been the subject of much debate. It is unclear whether the titles that appear in the film and which are not present in the scenario were later suggested by Desnos or were added by Man Ray independently of the poet's influence. Although both possibilities are equally plausible, if we look at other areas of Man Ray's work, certain justifications for the latter can be found. The shot of the leg that follows the first inter-title, whilst departing from our expectations based on the images I have mentioned from *Emak Bakia*, can be related to other sections of the same film. As the previous chapter discusses, as well as focusing on the visual qualities of the female face, *Emak Bakia*, in two key sequences, expresses an interest in women's legs detached from their bodies. In both

sections, this focus on legs is accompanied by a subversion of cinematic conventions and therefore the expectations of the spectator. The feet that dismount the car do not lead the film towards narrative progression but multiply into infinity, just as the dancing legs do not turn out to be a cutaway that is reconciled with the whole but which, to quote from Man Ray's own comment about the film "remains a fragment." Here we can see Man Ray delighting in the ability to reverse logical expectations and the creative possibilities of subversion. The same process can be seen operating in *L'Etoile*, since instead of referring to the beauty of women's legs, the inter-title subverts what would be a logical connection in favour of creating humorous discordance. Of course, this juxtaposition also reads as a more general comment on the relationship between text and image in the cinema. This concern is also expressed at the end of *Emak Bakia*, where a single inter-title humorously suggests an explanation for the film's concentration on form.

The following sequence again follows closely the indications made in the scenario. The man and woman are shown walking up a staircase and entering a bedroom. The woman undresses and lies down on the bed, after which the man stands up, kisses her hand and leaves the building. An inter-title appears just after the man leaves the female character's room – "Si belle! Cybèle?" Although the phrase does not feature in the scenario, it clearly belongs to the series of verbal puns and homophonies that characterised Desnos's poetry during the 1920s. What Man Ray brings to this sequence however is a striking sense of formal organisation that is also absent from the scenario. The entire section is structured through image pairings that create a perfectly symmetrical effect. It begins with the image of a door, which in itself is a repetition of the window that opens onto the action at the beginning of the film. This is mirrored by an identical shot at the end of the sequence of a closing door. The second shot of the two characters climbing the stairs is likewise paired with the second-to-last shot in which the man walks *down* the stairs towards the door. Again the execution of the shot is almost exactly the same in terms of camera position, framing and duration. The third shot in which the man and woman enter the room from behind the camera is mirrored by the shot of the man leaving as he disappears behind the camera. The framing here is that of a medium-long-shot. During the exchange between the two characters the framing changes to a medium-

close-up of the man. A gelatine filter that is used throughout the film and whose main function is to distort the images prevents us from reading any kind of significant facial expression or gesture, thus making the transition lack the usual narrative motivation that one could expect. This detail further supports the idea that Man Ray uses the alternation of shots not within the context of the traditional rules of continuity editing but rather creates a formal arrangement based on similarity and difference. The medium-close-up switches back to the medium-long-shot, only for the alternation to be repeated once more. In effect, this alternation of framings creates a triangular formation in the middle of the sequence, which can be illustrated as follows:

MLS

MCU MCU

MLS MLS

The mirrored pairings thus begin from the second medium-long-shot in which the woman takes off the last of her clothes, representing the point of the triangle. The overall effect of this formal organisation is that it creates a sense of visual rhythm that is developed somewhat independently of thematic content and demonstrates one of the ways in which Man Ray's attention to the visual organisation of the film goes beyond the concerns of the scenario. From this section, one can see clearly how elements of the scenario – the climbing of the stairs and the closing of the door – have been employed in a way that simultaneously interprets the original idea, whilst building into the film a sense of sustained visual organisation. Another indication of this pairing of shots can be found in the repetition of the image of the concrete tower that appears at the beginning of the following sequence. The corresponding indication in the scenario simply states "Dans la rue," whereas the shot in the film involves a vertical tilt of the camera from an empty street along the length of a concrete tower. Later in the film the same movement is made in reverse. Although a number of discussions have interpreted this image in terms of its phallic symbolism, it is clear from this perspective that its significance goes beyond the overriding concern with sexuality that is inscribed into the scenario.

The next section of the film introduces the motif of the starfish into the action, thus beginning the series of metonymic associations for which the film is renowned and about which more will be said later. In a medium long-shot, the same woman is shown selling newspapers on the street to invisible passers-by. A medium shot then shows her looking past the camera into the distance, followed by the inter-title, "Qu'elle est belle," the first that features also in the scenario. An upside down newspaper in close-up is lowered to reveal the woman's eyes, an iris-in heightening the emphasis (**Still 32**). The earlier medium-long-shot returns and into which the man walks, leading the woman away to another part of the street. This section of the film is interesting since in the scenario it is the female character that leads the man away and gives him the jar containing the starfish. Here, a close-up of the jar and an iris-in onto the starfish (**Still 33**) is followed by a shot in which the woman picks up the jar and holds it out in front of her in order to look at the object it contains. The man takes it out of her hands and repeats the same gesture. A final highly stylised shot shows the two characters, the man holding the jar out in front of him with the woman, her back to the camera, resting on his shoulder (**Still 34**). The sequence ends with another iris-in further confirming the significance of the starfish. A number of observations can be made about this short yet important sequence, which reflects upon Man Ray's visual interpretation of the scenario. The first of these is the element of visual discontinuity that is brought into the series of images and does not feature in the original description of the film. The shot that is placed in between those of the woman selling newspapers seems to momentarily break the narrative flow since it clearly does not belong to the accumulation of visual information that, despite the overriding ambiguity, follows the rules of continuity. This sense of what could be called 'abstraction' (relating it to one of the key characteristics of Man Ray's work) from the rest of the action is highlighted by the way in which the lower half of the woman's face is masked off by the newspaper. The nature of the shot recalls images of Kiki that appear in *Ballet Mécanique*, where a similar masking reveals only parts of her face such as the lips and eyes. The positioning of the newspaper contributes to this overall effect of abstraction in that it refuses the usual transmission of meaning with which a newspaper is normally associated. Here the process of signification is

once again brought into question and the text, as in certain sections of *Le Retour à la raison*, is reduced to a purely plastic function.

Another example of this narrative interruption occurs at the moment in which the two characters are shown staring at the jar containing the starfish. This shot, despite containing all the elements that are present in the previous shots, represents a sort of visual shock since the stylised pose of the characters breaks with the continuity of the action and focuses heavily on visual composition within the frame. Although Man Ray creates the impression of continuity by providing a sense of narrative development, discontinuity can be detected in the subtle details of the shot, which, like the final sequence of *Emak Bakia*, display a number of ruptures in the overall visual organisation. In the preceding shot, the two characters occupy the left half of the frame, with the man standing to the right of the woman, with his. The image in question then shows them in a medium-shot, again towards the left half of the frame, but in completely altered positions. Whereas in the previous image the man's gaze was directed towards the left-hand side of the frame, he now looks to the right. Even if we assume that this image represents an example of the 180° line having been crossed, the position of the woman does not correspond, since whilst the man's position has changed, she remains on the left-hand side of the frame. Discordance is also achieved by the sudden clarity of the image, in comparison with the other shots that are created with the filter, yet Man Ray does not aim to shock the viewer with outright incongruity but instead attempts to create an atmosphere in which reality is only slightly out of synch with how we normally experience it in the cinema.

It is through these images that Man Ray illustrates the chain of associations that link the starfish with the male and female characters. This aspect of the film is particularly important since it opens up one of the most crucial debates in the field of visual and literary semantics. The process by which one image – the starfish – comes to stand in for another – the woman – relates to the Surrealist use of metaphor, and the predominance of poetic structures in which comparative forms such as 'as' or 'like' play a decisive role. The Surrealists' admiration for the writings of poets such as Lautréamont derives particularly from the ability to transform traditional perceptions of the world by viewing one thing in relation to another. Linguistic

metaphors thus became the most precious tool for Surrealist expression and can be found particularly in the writings of Desnos. As an extension, then, it would be natural to read the images in *L'Etoile* in terms of filmic metaphors, and therefore as an adaptation of the techniques of literary Surrealism in order to create cinematic Surrealism. The repeated use of intertitles such as "belle, belle comme une fleur de verre," "belle comme une fleur de chair," (**Still 40**) and "belle comme une fleur de feu" that feature in Desnos's original script seems to represent the clearest attempt to bring literary metaphors into a visual structure. Allen Thiher argues, however, that *L'Etoile* ultimately fails to reproduce the effect of the literary metaphor (an effect that he sees as the film's "more profound ambition"), which depends on some kind of syntactical structure to create a framework of meaning:

> *L'Etoile de mer* has virtually no narrative structure. It thus forces us to confront one of the limits of cinematic discourse insofar as it attempts to create a prolonged metaphorical discourse. In *L'Etoile de mer* Ray and Desnos have discarded the rational use of metaphor as a form of binary transferrence and have attempted to juxtapose the star image with all the images in the film in order to create what we see as a prolonged surrealist simile. The juxtaposition of the starfish with any other given image – woman, knife, book, and so forth – is, in effect, an attempt to dislocate normal associative relations and analogies, with the goal of revealing those new relations that defy restrictive forms of logical discourse and thus reveal the marvelous.[36]

Although Thiher's discussion provides a useful insight into the subject of the cinematic metaphor, it necessarily brings us to the debate around the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, since the very presence of juxtaposition suggests a form of association characteristic of the latter. In fact, as Jean Mitry explains, most of what we consider to be film metaphors are actually a form of metonymy, which functions on the level of contiguity rather than similarity: "In the "comparative association" which generates a metaphorical idea there is not just comparison but also an actual association of elements, an exchange of significations, where each borrows from each other."[37] This process occurs when all elements are actually present *within* the signification chain, such as the starfish and the other images with

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[36] Thiher, "Man Ray and the Limits of Metaphor," p. 45.
[37] Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. Christopher King (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), p. 374.

which it is compared. Desnos's scenario therefore contains elements of metaphor and metonymy, since whilst the text to be inserted into the film as inter-titles often relates to the former (the *subsitution* of one signifier for another), the images themselves progress through a transferrence of qualites (or a *comparison* between signifiers) that points specifically to the latter.

The relevance of this observation becomes clear when we consider *L'Etoile* within the context of Man Ray's filmmaking, which, as the previous two chapters have demonstrated, revolves around the association between images and the process by which one or a series of images is understood in terms of its similarity or contrast with another. In relation to this, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the film is the way Man Ray's cinematisation of Desnos's scenario demonstrates the variety of techniques that can be used to visualise and bring to life what appear as rather banal associations in their literary form. This aspect of *L'Etoile* is overlooked by Thiher in his discussion of the film's "prolonged metaphorical discourse," which could be more accurately described as an interaction between literary and visual forms of metonymic structures.

The first clue to identifying Man Ray's interpretation of Desnos's metaphoric/metonymic associations can be found in the way in which similarities are drawn between the presentation of particular images. Since this sequence introduces the image of the starfish, it is crucial in the establishment of these associations. The shot of Kiki's face is the first non-distorted shot in the film, that is to say, without the gelatine filter. It is followed by the two shots featuring the starfish that have a direct relationship to it and which are similarly shot without the gelatine filter. There is a clear progression of associations that are linked not only through the comparative clarity of the image but also through the iris-in technique, which has the effect of focusing attention on a particular element within the frame. In this way the woman is associated with the newspaper, which is in turn associated with the starfish since the iris-in highlights almost exactly the same point on the screen. In the third association, the man holds the jar containing the starfish, whilst the woman stands with her back to the camera. This implies transference since we no longer see the woman's face and she is 'replaced' by the image of the starfish. The final shot completes this series of associations. The man is shown on his own with the starfish. Gradually the starfish

symbolically cancels out the presence of the woman. Whilst the association is simply hinted at in the scenario, with very little indication of how this transference was to take place in visual terms, it is Man Ray's awareness of visual structures that allows such relationships to be established.

In a perhaps intentionally exaggerated reconfirmation of the importance of the starfish's relationship with the woman, the next shot features an extreme-close up of the living creature (**Still 35**), a shot that does not feature anywhere in the scenario. This image signals a noticeable change of direction in the film and begins a considerably more formally dictated sequence, which I will analyse closely in the following section. Newspapers are seen being blown down a street and the male character appears and catches one. In a similar shot to the one in the previous sequence, a newspaper appears on the screen, only this time it is seen the correct way up and in extreme-close-up, inviting the spectator's participation in reading the words (**Still 36**). Yet, if the signification process initially seems to be reinstated through the presence of now identifiable signifiers, the spectator is nonetheless ultimately denied an overall meaning, since, although the article in the newspaper is readable, the slightly diagonal framing renders understanding impossible and only the title 'L'entrevue' and the first sentence – "Ier mars – Varsovie publie ce matin la réponse de M. ***" – are wholly visible. Apart from the title itself, which highlights the significance of the 'meeting' between the man and the woman, there is little logical connection between the article and the content of the film so far. Its purpose is rather to heighten ambiguity and the sense of mystery. The chase after the newspapers in the preceding section is presented as a symbolic representation of his desire for the woman, since the newspapers can be understood in terms of their metonymic relationship with the female character. From this perspective, the woman is presented as an elusive object, constantly slipping through the hands of the man and who, even when physically caught, continues to evade him with an ungraspable mystery. This chain of associations, like that involving the starfish in the earlier section, is already present in Desnos's scenario, but it is Man Ray's careful handling of the material that allows these ideas to be transmitted in a formally engaging way.

The man is next seen lying down, with the woman (off-screen) stroking his hair. A series of images, involving a train journey and shots of boats leaving a

harbour, follow. In the first version of the scenario Desnos indicates the motivation for these shots in the sentence "L'homme et la femme rêvent." Thus, the images of the train and the boat are presented as the content of their (shared) dream. However, maybe because Desnos found this direct association too formulaic, the second version states, "L'homme à genoux devant la femme et la tête sur les genoux," creating a more subtle and complex relationship between these images. This revision also places more emphasis on the male character's psyche and his relationship with the elusive woman around which the scenario clearly revolves. Here, the train and boat, representing travel and a means of escape can, like the image of the newspapers, be understood as symbolically referring to the distant woman, who despite her physical proximity to the male character, remains ultimately out of reach. One of the most interesting aspects of this sequence is exactly the way in which Man Ray turns what are presented in the scenario as symbolic or dream images tied to the male unconscious into fully developed formal explorations. The direct association that Desnos suggests between the image of the man and those of the boat and the train is greatly surpassed in the film, since the images take on a significance of their own, leaving behind any kind of symbolic subservience. Indeed Man Ray seems to momentarily abandon the narrative development at this point in order to concentrate on a number of visual elements that clearly do not belong to the diegesis of the film.

A return to the world of the story is signalled by the appearance of a flower, slightly out of focus, and the inter-title "si les fleurs étaient en verre." Comparative associations, as described by Mitry, become more clearly pronounced and serve to further demonstrate that the previous series of images breaks away from such associations. The single image also contrasts with the multiplicity of the previous sections but is immediately juxtaposed with one of the most striking shots of the entire film, in which the screen is divided into twelve separate segments, all containing movement of some sort (**Still 37**). Multiplicity is therefore demonstrated not in a series of shots that develop temporally but in a collage of images that place emphasis on spatial arrangement and simultaneity. The same shot of the flower returns but is now focused so that the image appears clearly (**Still 38**). An iris-in associates the woman with the flower, since Man Ray's use of this technique for highlighting metonymic associations is clearly established in earlier sections of the

film. The same inter-title also returns, as it does in Desnos's script, and is followed by an image of the woman in underwear lying on the floor, a broken bottle in front of her. An iris-in onto the broken glass again focuses attention on the development of associations that are brought together in the following still life of a newspaper on which are placed a bottle of wine, a glass, the starfish and a half-eaten banana.

The next section begins with a shot showing the woman stepping out of bed, her foot falling onto an open book on which is placed the barely visible starfish. In the following shot an iris out begins on the book and reveals exactly the same image as before but without the distorting gelatine filter (**Still 39**). This time the starfish appears on the floor next to the book, creating an intricate composition of elements. A temporal and spatial leap in the narrative occurs when the woman is next seen alone walking along the same country lane as that which features at the beginning of the film. The framing and duration of the shot are almost exactly the same, making the absence of the male character all the more noticeable. An inter-title announces "belle, belle comme une fleur de verre" and is replaced through a dissolve by a close-up of the starfish against a black background. The next shot shows the man and woman facing each other in a medium-close-up, the woman wearing a mask over her eyes which she pulls off as she smiles at the man. The innocence of the gesture contrasts starkly with the sinister quality of the subsequent shot of the mask in close-up, the eyes shining a bright unnatural white against a black background (**Still 40**). The inter-title "belle comme une fleur de chair" (**Still 41**) that momentarily overlaps with this shot further reinforces the symbolic interchange of qualities and draws attention to the use of duality: the idea of a 'flower of glass' contrasts starkly with that of a 'flower of flesh'. These transformations and dualities, developed linguistically by Desnos, are effectively mirrored in Man Ray's visual interpretation of the scenario, which attempts to establish visual oppositions and associations through a range of cinematic effects and subtly altered repetitions.

The earlier shot of the man alone with the jar containing the starfish is now repeated. As he stares at his hands, an iris-in once again focuses on the image of the starfish. A close-up of the hands reveals thick black lines drawn onto both palms and a dissolve into an even closer framing shows one hand with a line across the wrist becoming more visible. In a gesture that emphasises formal relationships rather than

thematic ones, Man Ray plays the two images against each other to create visual interest. The first shows both hands with the fingers pointing downwards whilst the second features one hand with the fingers, now disappearing out of the frame, in the opposite direction (**Still 42**). Clearly, the interest in similarity and contrast that so heavily characterises Man Ray's earlier films is not completely abandoned despite the thematic concerns of the scenario. The focus on repetition that is found in these films also becomes a gradually more prominent concern in *L'Etoile*. The door that opens and closes earlier in the film and which frames the scene in which the woman undresses in front of the man now reappears, opening and closing within the same shot. The woman is seen climbing the stairs of the apartment, with a second shot taken from the top of the stairs more clearly showing her wearing a black gown and holding a knife. A shot of the starfish at the bottom of the stairs interrupts her approach towards the camera, which ends with a close-up of both her face and the knife, a juxtaposition that is made all the more striking through the absence of the gelatine filter. Again, by way of reinforcing metonymic association, Man Ray inserts a very stylised shot that does not feature in the scenario, that of a medium-close-up of the woman's arm onto which is attached the starfish (**Still 43**). As she moves her hand, which still holds the knife, the starfish also moves, emphasising symbolic association through a very blatant physical connection.

An image of a prison wall and the inter-title, "Les murs de la Santé" that precedes it, remain as ambiguous in Man Ray's film as in Desnos's scenario since it is uncertain as to whether the reference to isolation and insanity is made in relation to the male or the (castrating) female character. The only real change made by Man Ray to this section of the film is the pan from the wall to the sky, which allows him to make an almost seamless transition to Desnos's image of the "ciel étoilé." Here the scenario makes an obvious visual link with the recurring motif of the starfish. The star-filled sky is followed by two shots that correspond to the indication in the scenario: "La Seine … qui coule." These shots of water are particularly interesting in the way Man Ray links them with the previous image of the sky at night in order to create a formal play of moonlight on the surface. They also relate to the emphasis on water in *Emak Bakia* (**Stills 20-22**) and the swimming pool sequence of *Les Mystéres du Château du Dé*. In the scenario, the indications featuring the night sky and the

Seine are presented as separate elements, whereas in the film they become formally linked. After the woman is seen behind the flames of a fire, another stylised image shows her in Phrygian costume, again drawing attention to the status of the image as a symbolic reference. It relates specifically to an earlier inter-title that states "Si belle! Cybèle?" and which refers to the ancient Phrygian goddess, the worshipping rites of whom involved, crucially, self-castration, leading to trans-sexuality and androgyny. Although the Phrygian theme is present in Desnos's original outline of the film, the inter-title itself was added at a later stage and raises the important question of whether Man Ray sought to further emphasise this aspect of the scenario. Androgyny and the question of sexuality was a recurring concern in both Dada and Surrealism and can be seen as one of the areas in which Man Ray's work seems to engage directly with these movements. Many of his photographs deal with the ambiguity of sexuality and explore the boundaries of gender by dressing the subject (sometimes himself) in clothes of the opposite sex. Gender, in many of these images, is seen as a transmutable entity related specifically to representation, itself a subject close to the artist's heart. Another shot of rising flames, this time with the woman absent, further emphasises this idea of alchemic transformation.

In the final sequence, the woman is seen from a distance lying half undressed on her bed, the gelatine filter creating only a vague impression of the image. We cut to a close-up of her sleeping face, and the return to the original shot, only this time she is completely naked. Although the filter has been removed, the focus is slightly blurred, simultaneously drawing the spectator into the intimacy of the scene whilst maintaining the required distance. An inter-title, "Vous ne rêvez pas", humorously draws attention to this momentary transgression. However, like much of the film, this phrase is striking in its multiple significance since the 'vous' could refer either to the viewer (working specifically within the context of the film/dream relationship of interest to the Surrealists) or the sleeping woman we see in the film. There is also a contrast in the film's mode of address since an earlier inter-title states "et si **tu** trouves sur cette terre une femme à l'amour sincère." Spatial and temporal dislocation is once again created when the woman is seen walking along the same path. This time the man walks into the right hand side of the frame from behind the camera (another repetition of action) and greets the woman. A third man (Robert

Desnos) enters the frame and leads the woman off to the left, the first man's disappointment shown in a close up as he turns his head to watch them leave, perhaps the first suggestion of emotion in the whole film. "Qu'elle était belle" becomes "qu'elle *est* belle" as he stares again at the contents of the jar, an iris-in and another close-up shot of the starfish completing the chain of associations. This last image of the male character relates directly to Desnos's account, featured earlier in this chapter, of the starfish as a symbol of lost love. The screen flickers from white to black and then reveals a final image of the woman behind a pane of glass onto which the word "belle" is written. The glass suddenly shatters in a self-reflexive reference to the breaking of cinematic illusion reminiscent of Man Ray's early films. The window that features at beginning of the film closes, concluding the action and providing an element of symmetry that has been a key characteristic throughout the film.

Form versus content

What should be clear from the above description of the film is the way in which Man Ray's formal interests develop beyond the demands of the scenario. One of the most generally overlooked aspects of *L'Etoile* is the extent to which it expresses visual concerns that are more easily related to Man Ray's cinematic sensibility than to Desnos's themes of love and desire. Inez Hedges has argued: "If any aspect of the film may be ascribed exclusively to Man Ray, it is the opposition between abstraction and allegorical narrative that threatens to pull the film in opposite directions. The progress of the story is continually threatened by stasis, by shots that appear as experiments in animating still photographs, and that recall his earlier films."[38] Since, as I have argued in previous chapters, Man Ray's cinematic work is characterised by such a tension between abstraction and figuration, it is hardly surprising that this should be a central feature of *L'Etoile*, despite its concentration on thematic developments. Although Desnos was interested in the imagery of cinema, it was primarily in the ability of these images to replicate certain dream processes that his attention was focused. He was not particularly interested in exploring the inherent plastic qualities of the medium, and, like many of the

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[38] Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer*," p. 107.

Surrealists, he abhorred the works of the early French Impressionist filmmakers, in which a range of cinematic techniques were employed to express the emotional states of the characters. In an open critique of this type of film, Desnos states:

> Un respect exagéré de l'art, une mystique de l'expression ont conduit tout un groupe de producteurs, d'acteurs et de spectateurs à la création du cinéma dit d'avant-garde, remarquable par la rapidité avec laquelle ses productions se démodent, son absence d'émotion humaine et le danger qu'il fait courir au cinéma tout entier.[39]

He goes on to criticise the use of certain 'technical processes' that are unmotivated by the action, which can be assumed to include superimposition, split screen, rapid editing etc; in other words those techniques that significantly alter the impression of reality.

It is specifically within this area that the singular aims of Man Ray and Desnos can be seen to emerge, for although the scenario points to the importance of narrative and the focus on the Surrealist themes of love, mystery, madness and desire, the visual interpretation of the film introduces a number of plastic concerns that distract attention away from content and towards form. Hedges is one of the few commentators to highlight the relationship between these sections of the film and the formal qualities of *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia* and as such paves the way for a revised consideration of *L'Etoile* not simply as a Surrealist film but as Man Ray's interpretation of a Surrealist scenario. In order to facilitate a clearer understanding of this relationship I will consider these sections of the film in detail, paying close attention to the way in which they affect a Surrealist reading. Even in the introductory text, "L'étoile de mer. Poème de Robert Desnos tel que l'a vu Man Ray," our attention is focused on the relationship between the two forms of expression around which film is structured: image and text. Iannis Katsahnias draws attention to the formal interpretation of the scenario and highlights the important issue of authorship that characterises the film: "Pour la première fois, Man Ray fait un film qui suit une trame et des images proposées par quelqu'un d'autre. Cela ne l'empêche pas d'experimenter pour autant."[40] For although the genesis of the film

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[39] Desnos, "Cinéma d'avant-garde." In his *Cinéma*, p. 189.
[40] Iannis Katsahnias, "Le Chasseur de Lumière," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 390, December 1986, p. 47.

can be traced to the poetic sensibility of Desnos and certain concerns related to Surrealism, many of its formal characteristics would seem to be in conflict with the poet's conception of cinematic expression. Whilst Desnos aims to create a hermetically sealed world, comparable to the structure of the dream, Man Ray constantly undermines this world by breaking with the illusion of reality and introducing a number of self-reflexive strategies. These processes of self-reflexivity relate not only to the material and technical basis of film but also draw attention to the personality of the artist. This latter point is particularly relevant in the context of the making of the film since it represents Man Ray's attempt to stamp his identity on a piece of work that was not entirely his own.

Although the sections of the film were worked out carefully by Desnos and later rearranged slightly by Man Ray, it is in fact a formal device that provides the most striking organisational principle. As was already mentioned briefly above, a gelatine filter is placed intermittently over the lens, creating a blurred, distorted perception, reminiscent of similar effects of distortion in *Emak Bakia*. This immediately works into the film the abstraction/figuration dichotomy that characterises the previous two films and thus shifts the emphasis from a thematic to a formal structure. As Man Ray recounts, the filter was used as a direct response to the requirements of the scenario, as a way to avoid censorship: "There were one or two rather delicate points to consider: the portrayal of absolute nudes would never get by the censors. I would not resort to the usual devices of partial concealment in such cases as practiced by movie directors. There would be no soft-focus, nor artistic silhouette effects. I prepared some pieces of gelatine by soaking, obtaining a mottled or cathedral-glass effect through which the photography would look like sketchy drawing or painting."[41] This seems to represent the first hurdle in turning the text into images, forcing Man Ray to consider and adapt to the restrictions of the industry. His second film, *Emak Bakia*, had already attempted to push the boundaries of cinematic representation by introducing an element of eroticism detached from any narrative justification. The repeated shots of women's legs, like the nude torso in *Le Retour à la raison*, were, as Norman Gambill suggests, "a radical and historically

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[41] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 225.

unprecedented departure."[42] Whilst these earlier films approach the body within the context of aesthetic contemplation and therefore partly direct attention away from its sexual connotations, the sexual emphasis is integral to Desnos's scenario. What is interesting in Man Ray's treatment of the material is precisely the way in which the visual restrictions of the scenario give rise to formal experimentation. His refusal to conform to popular cinematic vocabulary has the effect of turning attention back to the plastic concerns so prevalent in his earlier films. The process by which Man Ray channels the conditions – either freedoms or restrictions – of a particular cinematic project into technical and formal experimentation is a recurring element in his filmmaking. I have discussed this already in relation to *Emak Bakia*, but it is also a key characteristic of *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

What conclusions can we draw about the use of the gelatine filter? It is clear that its significance extends beyond the practical function ascribed to it since it also creates a sense of visual duality that continues throughout the film. As Katsahanias points out: "Ce plan est à l'image de tout le film: un effort pour créer une hallucination vraie."[43] This emphasis on the way the filter facilitates the co-existence of reality and unreality clearly highlights the importance of subjective vision that was of crucial importance to the Surrealists. Katsahanias' notion of a real or true hallucination also seems to reflect on the nature of the cinema itself, echoing the Surrealists' fascination with the resemblance of the film with the dream. Yet, although this aspect of the film is sometimes interpreted in terms of its attempt to establish the different levels of reality corresponding to the states of dream and wakefulness[44], its overriding emphasis on form blocks any kind of identification with the characters and the world occupied by them. Furthermore, whilst Surrealism aims towards the unification of the two states, *L'Etoile* treats them as separate entities, i.e., as having a significantly different visual appearance. The alternation between the two forms of vision also breaks the emphasis on narrative that dominates the scenario. In his discussion of the film, Sitney points to the self-reflexive characteristic of the

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[42] Norman Gambill, "The Movies of Man Ray." In: *Man Ray: Photographs and Objects* (Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1980), p. 33.
[43] Katsahnias, "Le Chasseur de Lumière," p. 47.
[44] Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman: Man Ray, Dada and Surrealist Film-Maker," p. 371.

gelatine filter. "The alternation of lenses points first of all to the very fact that films are shot through lenses. *L'Etoile de mer* is a film about seeing the world through layers of glass. The camera always protects its sensitive film surface from the exterior world with a wall of glass. The implication here is that the so-called normal lens is as artificial as the stippled one."[45] This move away from the consideration of the distorted lens as an attempt to create surrealism towards an understanding of the way it reflects on the nature of cinematic vision realigns the film with concerns specific to Man Ray. As I have argued in chapter two, the emphasis on the camera lens and the idea of a cinematically mediated 'reality' is a key feature of *Emak Bakia* and is stated from the very outset in the opening shot in which the camera lens is juxtaposed with the superimposed eye. Distorted lenses are also used in that film to problematise the notion of objective vision.

Man Ray further draws attention to the glass through which we perceive the world in one of the final shots of the film in which Kiki is seen behind a pane of glass on which is written "belle." (**Still 44**) The writing renders that which is normally invisible perceptually present, since it creates a layer that is seen rather than seen *through*. The smashing of the glass consolidates this idea, taking the perception of the glass layer to the final stage of concrete realisation. From this perspective, the last shots of the film can be read in terms of a progressive destruction of the illusion of reality. In both *Emak Bakia* and *L'Etoile de mer* the emphasis on glass goes beyond references to the camera lens and exists at various levels of content. In the former it appears in the form of reflecting crystals and prisms but is also suggested in the sequence in which fish appear to swim in front of the camera. We are again faced with the absence/presence phenomena since the execution of the shot hides the glass container that holds the fish, whilst it is the presence of the glass that makes the shot possible. The same awareness of absence and presence is inscribed into *L'Etoile* through the alternation of lenses. The presence of the gelatine filter represents absence of vision, whilst the presence of vision in the normally filmed sequences is marked by the absence of distortion.

A close look at the structure of the film reveals that the gelatine filter is used in the majority of the scenes that feature the characters, leading A. L. Rees to state it

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[45] Sitney, "The Instant of Love: Image and Title in Surrealist Cinema," p. 29.

"refuses the authority of 'the look.'"[46] Indeed, one of the main effects of the filter is that it prevents the viewer from connecting with the characters on an emotional level since their actions and facial expressions are always shrouded in mystery. This is particularly evident at the beginning of the film where the woman undresses in front of the man, who promptly gets up and leaves. The mixture of responses to this scene is no doubt due to the fact that the use of the filter increases the ambiguity surrounding the characters' motives and emotional responses. Thus Man Ray transfers to the characters the very qualities that define his visual expression. In other words, objects and actors are submitted to the same de-familiarisation processes. The refusal of the look to which Rees refers is part of a larger refusal of representational objectivity and a move towards abstraction. A similar process can be seen to operate in *Les Mystères du Chateau du Dé* in which the 'actors' in the film all wear stockings over their faces to hide their identity but also as a method of depersonalisation that allows them to be turned into objects of formal contemplation. This interpretation challenges the view expressed by a number of commentators on the film that the filter is employed randomly with no clear motivation for either type of vision. I would argue that, on the contrary, there is a pattern that is developed, which emphasises a concentration on form and abstraction. The filter is present throughout the whole first sequence of the film in which the two characters meet and finally separate. It is interrupted by a normally filmed shot in which the camera tilts down the length of a tower building to reveal an empty street. Whatever interpretation is made of this shot on a thematic level, e.g., the tower as a phallic symbol that relates to the quasi-sexual exchange that has just taken place, it cannot be ignored that the first shot of the film without the distorted lens concentrates on geometric composition. The vertical movement of the camera corresponds to the structure of the tower and ends where the tower meets the street and creates a geometric angle. Thus, besides functioning as a metaphor within the framework of the film's narrative, it also concentrates on formal composition within the frame. The absence of the filter allows this quality to be fully absorbed. The alternation also facilitates the understanding of metaphoric associations, since the majority of the shots without the filter develop the relationship between the male and female characters and a

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[46] A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London: BFI, 1999), p. 43.

range of motifs, such as the starfish, newspapers, fire, water, etc. These are usually brought together by the use of the iris-in.

Beyond these conclusions about the use of different lenses, a concentration on the plastic qualities of the cinematic image can be seen in various parts of the film. The first of these occurs just after the characters are presented. They are shown walking together towards the camera and then in a seemingly unmotivated transition we see a shot of their feet moving in synchronicity. There is a certain aesthetic pleasure to be derived from the harmonised movement of the two pairs of legs detached form the bodies to which they belong. For a fleeting moment, Man Ray indulges in the plastic qualities of this movement and, as if to further emphasise the effect, slows down the action slightly. This is a key example of what Hedges calls a moment of 'stasis' in which the content of the film momentarily escapes from the narrative flow and develops not along the horizontal axis of story development but on a vertical axis of visual exploration. The brief spectacle is brutally disrupted with an abrupt movement away from the feet, creating a blurred effect similar to that of the thrown camera in the collision sequence of *Emak Bakia*. The juxtaposition of the feet in slow motion with the very rapid sweeping movement of the camera creates a visual shock whilst also functioning to underline the nature of cinematic movement. It is interesting to compare this section of the film with the instructions provided in the scenario, which simply state: "Marche. Leurs jambes." Whilst the written description focuses on the effect of repetition (the word 'jambe' appears three times in the description of the first set of images), juxtaposing the banal action of walking with the highly sexual connotation of the legs, Man Ray's interpretation of the text foregrounds the formal beauty of the image over its thematic function. The fragmentation of the body for the purpose of formal exploitation and the foregrounding of artistic techniques are key characteristics of Man Ray's work and can be found operating on a number of levels in his films. The shot mentioned above can be compared to other sections of *Emak Bakia* that express related concerns, notably the superimposed feet dismounting the car and the dancing legs.

The concentration on form is demonstrated most effectively in a series of images that begin about a third of the way through the film. After a predominantly narrative-based development – which focuses on the exchanges between the male

and female characters – the film changes direction, presenting a number of self-contained moments of visual exploration. This begins with an extreme close-up of the starfish that naturally follows the preceding shots in which the animal gradually becomes the focus of attention of both characters. The very close framing is partly justified by the level of concentrated fascination expressed by the man as, alone in his room, he studies the contents of the jar by the light of a lamp. However, whatever symbolic link can be made between the man and the starfish is gradually made tenuous through the prolonged duration of the shot, at forty-five seconds, the longest in the film. The slow writhing of the sea creature's body creates a hypnotising study of form and movement that has strong links with the equally long sequence of goldfish in *Emak Bakia*. Carl Belz, largely referring to this section of the film, has argued that the "blatant and obscene image of the starfish "with its wreathing tentacles, scaly surface, and ugly, devouring mouth" provides a counterpoint to scenes of eroticism and as such represents "Desnos's use of abrupt and sensuous contrasts."[47] Although the image of the starfish clearly originates with the poet, its visual representation in the film must also be considered from the perspective of Man Ray's own concerns and tendencies. It should be noted in relation to this point that this particular image does not feature in the original scenario and was probably added by Man Ray during the filming, throwing into question the idea put forward by Belz that the more sinister qualities of the starfish can be worked into what he ultimately considers as a Surrealist dichotomy of attraction and repulsion. In fact, the slow, delicate movements of the starfish accentuated by the framing can be read as having a subtly erotic and sensual nature that further challenges this interpretation.

A closer consideration of this shot allows us to see the difference between Man Ray and Desnos's relationship to cinematic imagery. In the scenario, the role of the starfish is reduced to its symbolic properties. Desnos relies heavily on the powers of association common to Surrealist poetry, and which are demonstrated throughout the film's inter-titles: "belle comme une fleur de verre," "belle comme une fleur de chair," "belle comme une fleur de feu." The association of the woman with these image juxtapositions builds a gradual understanding of the nature of the male character's feelings towards her. The repeated presence of the starfish aims to

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[47] Belz, "The Film Poetry of Man Ray," p. 124.

achieve a similar effect through image association. Thus it is reduced to a mere symbolic motif. The artificiality of this process is mirrored in the lifeless object that stands in for the actual living creature and which is simply placed alongside other elements within the frame in order to create an associative exchange. In contrast to this, the shot added by Man Ray brings the animal to life and explores it beyond the reductive position to which it is condemned in the scenario. The idea of the emancipation of the starfish from its static symbolic role is very strongly suggested in this image, since it shows the animal moving freely without the constrictions of the glass jar through which it is perceived in the preceding shots. The duration of the shot further emphasises this hypothesis as it functions as a temporal correlative to the spatial development. In other words, whilst the viewer is forced into a contemplation of the starfish through its physical abstraction from the rest of the film, the length of time for which the image stays on the screen produces a halt in the narrative, severing the previous system of association that requires a much more rapid presentation of images.

In the following sequence ten consecutive shots of newspapers being blown along the street by the wind are rapidly edited together. Along with the movement of the camera that frantically tries to keep up with the sheets as they tumble and turn in all directions, the staccato rhythm produced by the editing creates a temporal counterpoint to the slow and gradual movement of the starfish represented in a continuous static shot. The distortion to which the movement of the papers coupled with that of the camera gives rise can be compared with certain kinetic explorations found in *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*. This scene also bears a strong resemblance to sections of Hans Richter's *Vormittagsspuk* (*Ghosts Before Breakfast*, 1927), in which "four bowler hats, some coffeecups and neckties "have enough" (are fed-up) and revolt from 11.50 to 12 a.m. Then they take up their routine again … The chase of the rebellious "Untertanen" (objects are also people) threads the story. It is interrupted by strange interludes of pursuit which exploit the ability of the camera to overcome gravity, to use space and time completely freed from natural laws. The impossible becomes reality and reality, as we know, is only one of the possible forms

of the universe."[48] The free, liberated movement of the sheets of newspaper represents a similar revolt against the world of logic and order to which they traditionally belong. The impression of spontaneity that is felt in this section of the film contrasts with the stylised nature of the previous sequences in which gesture and motif become increasingly important. We can compare this series of shots of the newspapers with the final sequence of *Emak Bakia* in which shirt collars are wrenched from their everyday function and enter into a world of purely visual relationships. Richter's statement is interesting in this context as it seems to express aspects of both Dada and Surrealism that are also central aspects of Man Ray's films.

One of the most visually interesting moments occurs about half way through the film in a series of images related to the theme of travel. In the scenario this section is described in only two shots: "Un train qui passe" and "Un bâteau". What is interesting about Man Ray's interpretation of these two indications is the way he transforms a relatively banal and fleeting reference into a play of purely visual elements. The reference to the train is clearly used as an opportunity to explore cinematic movement since rather than viewing the speed of the train from the detached and objective position suggested by the scenario, Man Ray invites the viewer to experience and become involved in the movement through the subjective position of passenger. An image of rails disappearing off the screen is followed by a number of shots of the passing landscape. The attempt to recreate the perceptual experience is represented in the repetition of the same image, which flickers almost imperceptibly across the screen five times. Through this repetition, Man Ray achieves the same kind of rhythmic effect as that of repeated alternations between the dancer and the banjo player in *Emak Bakia*. The use of the theme of travel as the basis for visual exploration can also be seen as playing a key role in Man Ray's films and to which I have drawn attention in other chapters. This emphasis on subjective vision is also a key element in the following series of images involving views from a boat. This time, as if in an ironic reference to the rudimentary description in the scenario, the flat silhouette of a boat slides across the frame, its artificial nature creating a counterpoint to the realism of the previous images. Indeed, it is the

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[48] Hans Richter, "Dada and the Film." In: *Dada: Monograph of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf (Teufen, Switzerland: Arthur Niggli, 1957), p. 70.

documentary-like quality of this short section of images that sets it apart from the rest of the film.

In the previous chapter I have discussed the importance of repetition as a formal device in *Emak Bakia*. Although *L'Etoile* initially seems to represent a departure from Man Ray's previous concerns, it is through an analysis of formal similarities that we gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between the two films and the way in which these visual qualities are worked into the framework provided by Desnos. An analysis of repetition allows us to detect a certain convergence between the scenario and the film and an overlapping of the individual concerns of Desnos and Man Ray. Allen Thiher, as I have discussed above, has described *L'Etoile* in terms of the creation of filmic figures through which a sense of thematic coherence emerges. He notes that the film is structured predominantly through the appearance of specific motifs, which function by means of association with other images in the film:

> These motifs are created by the repetition of images, and one can say that in this type of film, much as in surrealist poetry, the initial level of meaning is generated almost exclusively by recurrence. The most obvious example is the star-starfish motif that the film presents as its opening images. This image occurs most frequently in the film and dominates the thematic modulations. A description of the film also shows that in spite of the great diversity of images, a rather small number of motifs are generated in it.[49]

Indeed, it is not difficult to identify these motifs since they are presented both on a visual level and through the insertion of text. There is for instance the very clear motif of sexual desire, presented in the repetition of the word "belle" in relation to the female character, but also, through association, to the image of the starfish, which stands in for the woman. The flower, itself a symbol of female sexuality, is another recurring element as is the image of glass, which appears in many different forms and to which I have already briefly referred. However, whilst Thiher's observation about the role of repetition in *L'Etoile* makes a useful comparison between poetic structures and corresponding strategies in filmic images, it does not take into account the formal repetitions that are not tied to the thematic concerns emerging from the

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[49] Thiher, "Man Ray and the Limits of Metaphor," p. 39.

scenario but which relate more specifically to Man Ray's sense of visual organisation. These repetitions, rather than contributing to the narrative development, represent instead further examples of stasis, where the image breaks away from thematic connections.

A careful consideration of both the scenario and the film reveals some of the ways in which Man Ray's interpretation establishes formal patterns that build on Desnos's concentration on repetition. The image of the opening and closing window at the beginning and end of the film adds another layer of repetition to that found in the scenario, in which the initial image of the man and woman walking down the street is repeated towards the end of the film and culminates with the woman leaving with a different man. This detail has been discussed from the perspective of Surrealism since it represents a symbolic entry into another world, locating the action "beyond our daily realm of ordinary time and causality."[50] Yet as I have stated earlier, it is precisely this separation of the two states of waking and dreaming or consciousness and unconsciousness that leads to the weakening of the film's surrealist effect. In this sense, it can be compared to Antonin Artaud's disapproval of the presentation of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* as a dream. "I shall not try to excuse the apparent inconsistency by the facile subterfuge of dreams"[51] Artaud stated, clearly arguing, as did Breton, for the fusion of dream and reality through the language of film. Man Ray's addition of the framing device in *L'Etoile* betrays an overriding interest in formal organisation that seems somewhat at odds with the aims of Surrealism.

Music

Like Desnos, Man Ray was not a purist when it came to the enhancement of cinematic images through the addition of external elements. In his discussions with Pierre Bourgeade he speaks about colour and three-dimensional images and even goes as far as to conceive of a kind of expanded cinema, where the experience of watching a film would involve other atmosphere-inducing elements such as odours. Although *Le Retour à la raison* was projected as a silent film, *Emak Bakia* incorporated the use of predominantly popular jazz music, which, as I have

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[50] Ibid, p. 39.
[51] Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works 3: Scenarios on the cinema, interviews, letters*, p. 20.

mentioned in the previous chapter, contributes significantly to the building sense of rhythm in that film. Similarly, music plays a key role in *L'Etoile de mer* and deserves to be considered in some detail. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that, along with a short outline of the film, Desnos also wrote a plan for the film's musical accompaniment, which can be found in the Bibliothèque du film in Paris. These musical indications are incorporated into the later version of the scenario, specifying at exactly which moment in the film a certain piece of music was to feature. Inez Hedges has, with the help of Francis Naumann, traced these annotations to the hand of Man Ray, a detail that has nonetheless been questioned by Bouhours and De Haas.[52] Irrespective of whether or not these annotations were *written* by Man Ray, they were clearly conceived by Desnos within the context of his Surrealist vision of the film and relate almost exactly to those contained in the original document. That the initial musical choices were uniquely those of Desnos is supported by the fact that Man Ray's own later instructions for the musical accompaniment do not correspond to those found in the scenario.

The difference between the two men's approach to the way the music would interact with and complement the images on the screen further testifies to a fundamental duality at the heart of the film that sees Man Ray adapting the Surrealist concerns of Desnos to his own conception of cinematic expression. As Bouhours and De Haas argue, Desnos's original outline for the music foregrounds the element of discordance and also, crucially, makes use of sound not simply as an accompaniment to the images but as an independent creative force in the film:

> Le premier accompagnement sonore prévu par le poète comporte, outre des indications musicales, des incrustations de bruitages de cris humains, ainsi que la reproduction de *L'internationale* "jouée faux". Si ce "détail" avait été conservé, il eût peut-être aidé André Breton à se réconcilier avec le film, dont la première fut un événement trop mondain à son goût … Le rendez-vous du surréalisme avec le cinéma sonore a bien failli se jouer ici. La version ultérieure de ce scénario laissera de côté ces aspects iconoclastes de la bande sonore pour un accompagnement strictement musical, moins directement articulé aux images.[53]

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[52] Bouhours and De Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, p. 63.
[53] Ibid, p. 63.

Desnos's conception of discordance in the way sound relates to image bears a striking similarity with the idea of contrapuntal sound that was developed in 1928 by the Russian filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrovin, where the soundtrack is used to question and undermine the meaning transmitted by the image. "The first experimental work with sound," they wrote, "must be directed along the line of its distinct nonsynchronization with the visual images. And only such an attack will give the necessary palpability which will lead to the creation of an orchesteral counterpoint of visual and aural images."[54] Importantly, this method of juxtaposing sound or music with the image rather than using it as a simple accompaniment challenges the illusionist nature of the cinema and the idea of the total work of art, whilst also thinking ahead about the future impact of sound on cinematic expression. Many filmmakers, artists and writers were dubious about the way in which the introduction of 'talking pictures' would affect the visual power of the cinema and conceived of different ways to overcome this weakening or diluting effect that sound threatened to bring about. The clash between image and sound would seem to be the perfect means by which the Surrealist filmmaker could give rise to Breton's notion of 'convulsive beauty' and it is indeed for this reason that Bouhours and De Haas consider *L'Etoile de mer* in terms of a missed opportunity to create a potentially powerful example of Surrealist cinematic expression that would have undoubtedly appealed to Breton.

It is important to observe the series of changes made to the musical accompaniment between the original outline made by Desnos and the indications left by Man Ray, which now feature as part of the film. As Bouhours and De Haas point out, the initial idea that the section of the film featuring the train and the boat should be accompanied by silence and then indistinct cries of "ah! ah!" does not feature in the later version of the scenario. This is interesting since, as we have already seen, the first draft of the scenario firmly relates these images to the dreaming characters, whilst the revised one replaces "L'homme et la femme rêvent" with the more visually conceived "L'homme à genoux devant la femme et la tête sur les genoux." Thus the act of dreaming is suggested rather than stated and has much stronger

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[54] Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrov, "Statement on Sound." *In: The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939,* eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 235.

sexual overtones. To accompany this change, Desnos included "le tambourin de Rameau", which was subsequently replaced with 'O sole mio'. Thus, the original suggestions are replaced with a much more conventional notion of musical accompaniment. Furthermore, the idea to include 'L'Internationale' played with false notes during the sections featuring the deserted street and the woman in Phrygian costume are similarly abandoned in the second version of the scenario. Despite these initial changes, which make the second scenario seem slightly less subversive than the first, the role played by music in Desnos's conception of the film is clearly an important one and his choices demonstrate not only a depth of musical knowledge but also an interest in the way image and music can enter into a dialogue. However, the interrelationship conceived by Desnos differs greatly to that created by Man Ray in *Emak Bakia* for example, where musical rhythms combine with visual ones. Here, Desnos is interested not in the use of music as a support to the visual component but in the creation of an independent unit of expression that comes into play with the images on an equal level. In this sense, music is used in the same way as inter-titles, making film more than just moving images.

Desnos uses music to add another layer to the film that is comparable to the use of inter-titles since a number of his suggested pieces were chosen because of the signification of the lyrics. 'Plaisir d'amour' for example was written by the poet Jean Pierre Claris de Florian during the eighteenth century and expresses the theme of lost love and deception that features regularly in Desnos's own work. It recounts the story of a dejected lover who loses the woman for whom he has given up everything to another man and focuses on the double-sidedness of love and the callousness of women. The first two lines of the song, "Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment" and "Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie" are singled out to begin and end the film, further demonstrating that it is not the music itself that is important but the emotional signification of the lyrics. This is similarly the case with the use of 'O sole mio', clearly highlighting the notion of loneliness and desolation that is found in some of the film's imagery such as the empty street and the prison walls. Other pieces of music chosen by Desnos include 'Dernier tango' and 'Le Beau Danube Bleu', a waltz by Johann Strauss, both significant in the way they evoke dance and thus the male-female interaction, which develops intricately through time by way of a number

of discrete actions and interchanges between the couple. Finally, perhaps the most interesting detail of the original musical outline is the inclusion of 'La carmagnole' and 'L'Internationale', equating the relationship between man and woman with revolutionary struggle and social reform, concerns very dear to the Surrealist project. Along with the inclusion of the then popular waltz and tango pieces and as Desnos states in the first version of the scenario, "quelque chose de très connu dans l'oeuvre de Bach," which by the second revision had become 'L'aria', these musical details attest to a desire on the part of the poet to use film as both a creative and revolutionary tool that would speak to the spectator through direct metaphoric and cultural references.

There is little available information concerning the exact musical accompaniment for the first public screenings of the film in Paris, Brussels, Berlin and New York and therefore it is uncertain whether or not the musical indications by Desnos were followed. Man Ray refers to only one event in his autobiography, where the film was screened before Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1931). He states simply that the theatre owner allowed him to "coach" the trio of musicians.[55] Neil Baldwin, confusing this second run of the film with the premier, which was held at the same venue, notes that "Man Ray chose recordings of Cuban dance music to accompany the film at the last moment, discarding his elaborately plotted orchestral scenario in favour of a more disruptive and violent background."[56] In any case, Man Ray would later revise and change the music and it is possible that, for at least a certain period of time, it was shown with a diverse accompaniment depending on the theatre, orchestra and the country in which it happened to be screened. The film is nowadays accompanied by the five pieces of music chosen by Man Ray during the 1940s and left in a box containing disks to be played with all of his films (with the exception of *Le Retour à la raison*, which remains without musical accompaniment). Interestingly, the majority of these songs are from popular films of the 1930s, including the opening track, 'C'est lui' performed by Josephine Baker, which was composed for the film *Zouzou* (Marc Allégret, 1934). There is also 'Los Piconeros' from *Carmen, la de Triana* (Florian Rey, 1938) and 'Au fond de tes yeux' sung by Mistinguett for the film *Rigolboche* (Christian-Jaque, 1936). The two other musical

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[55] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 225.
[56] Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist*, p. 143.

pieces to be played with the film are 'Saetas' by the Spanish flamenco singer 'La Niña de los peines' (The Woman with the Spanish Combs) and 'Sigonomi sou zito'.

Thus, the focus on classical music that is represented by Desnos's indications is rejected for a more contemporary atmosphere, a detail that is emphasised by the fact that Man Ray further revised the music to be played with all of his films during the 1960s, choosing more recent, and perhaps therefore more culturally relevant pieces.[57] Furthermore, the initial effect of discordance that was originally conceived by Desnos does not seem to be a concern of Man Ray's in his selection of accompanying music, which tends towards discreetly complementing the images with a seamless flow from one song to the next rather than the exploration of sound as an individual creative element. Another important detail is that all the songs in Man Ray's selection of music are sung by female vocalists and therefore tend to reverse Desnos's focus on the male psyche and the understanding of the woman from this perspective. Following Man Ray's instructions, the film begins with a song in which a woman sings about a man, stating "c'est lui". This contrasts somewhat with the opening music detailed in the Desnos's scenario, which focuses more directly on the themes central to the film itself. Although Desnos seems to have left aside some of the more Surrealist elements in his revisions, Man Ray's choices take the film even further from these goals, opting instead for a less conspicuous accompaniment that gives full attention to the expressive power of the images.

L'Etoile de mer clearly illustrates the artistic personalities of both Man Ray and Robert Desnos and as such represents an important exchange between visual and literary Surrealism. However, while the film has its origins in the Surrealist scenario, it develops visual ideas outside the realms of Surrealism, many of which can be seen to have a very direct relationship with Man Ray's work in other areas as well as expressing his distinct cinematic approach. It therefore demonstrates to some extent the distance between Man Ray and the official Surrealist movement, despite his association with the group. In his autobiography, Man Ray describes Desnos's reaction to his list of invitations to the film's premier screening: "When Breton and the Surrealists were mentioned, a wild look came into his eyes; he began a violent

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[57] Bouhours and De Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, p. 42.

tirade against the former. There had been a bitter falling out between them, of which I wasn't aware, as it was a period in which I hadn't been frequenting the group."[58] The fact that the making of *L'Etoile de mer* coincides with this seemingly individualist episode in Man Ray's career only serves to support the notion that he was interested less in the official Surrealist practices and doctrines laid out by Breton than in the paths of his own artistic development.

[58] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 225.

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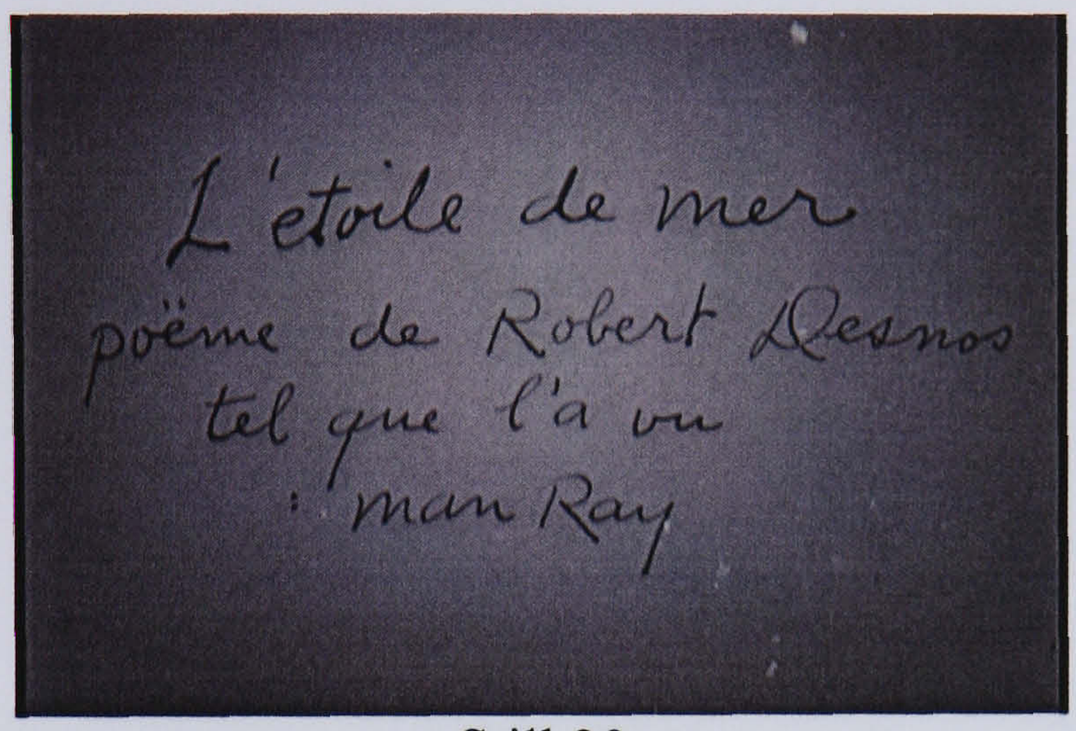

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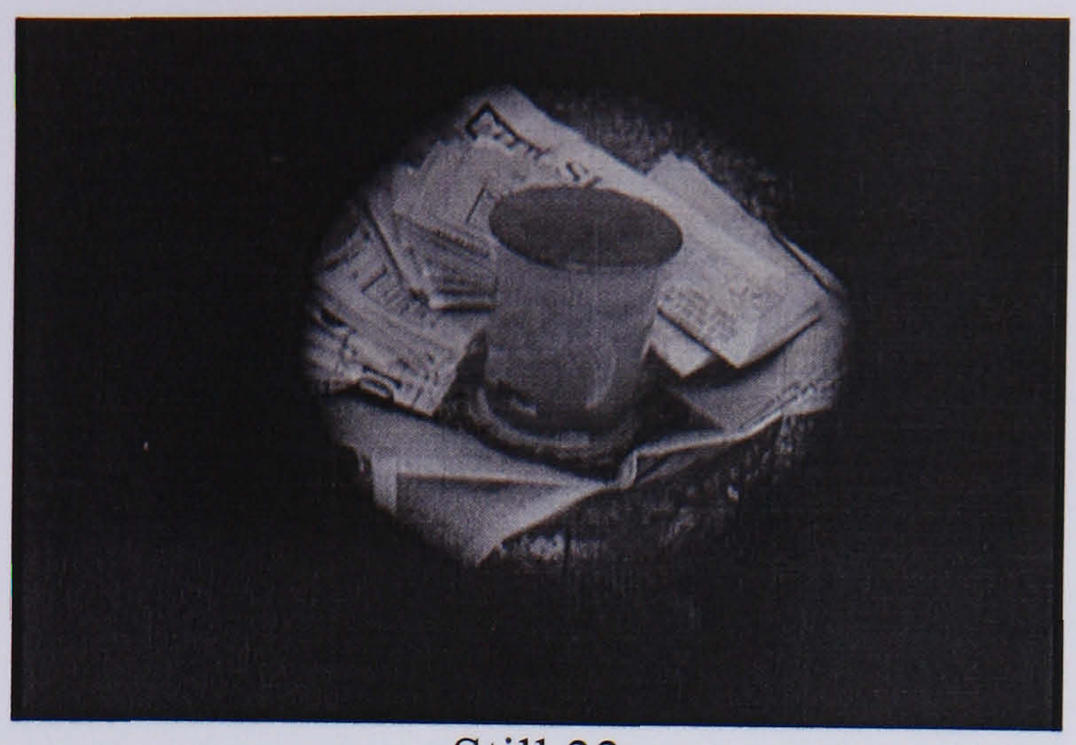

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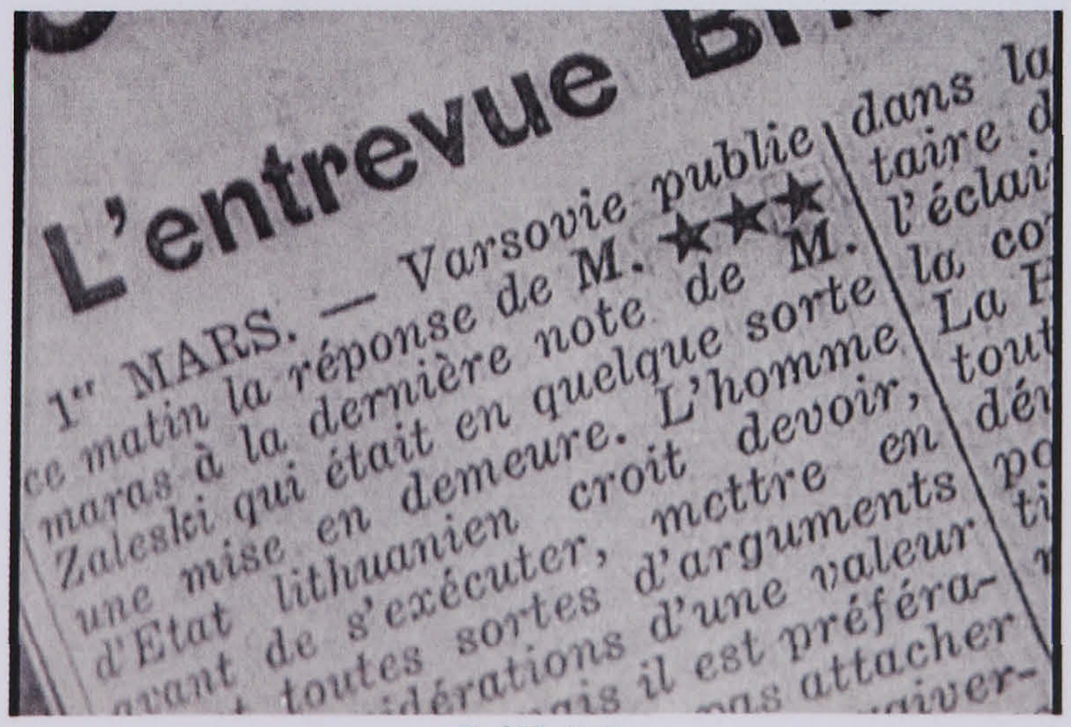

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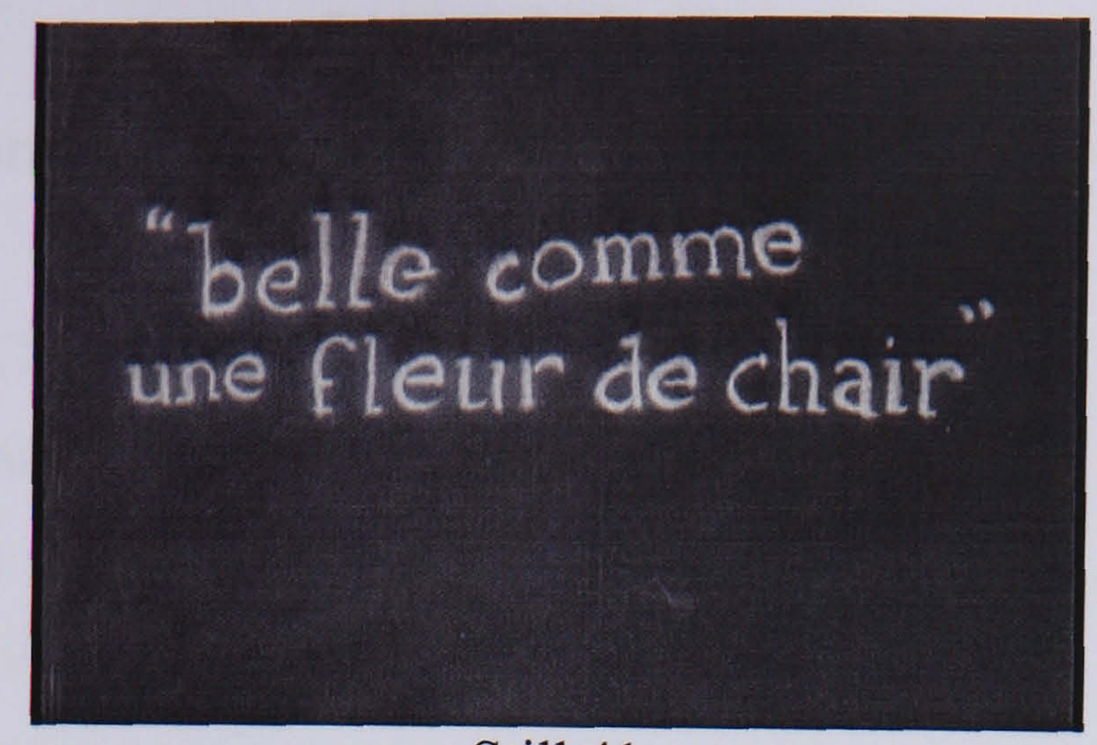

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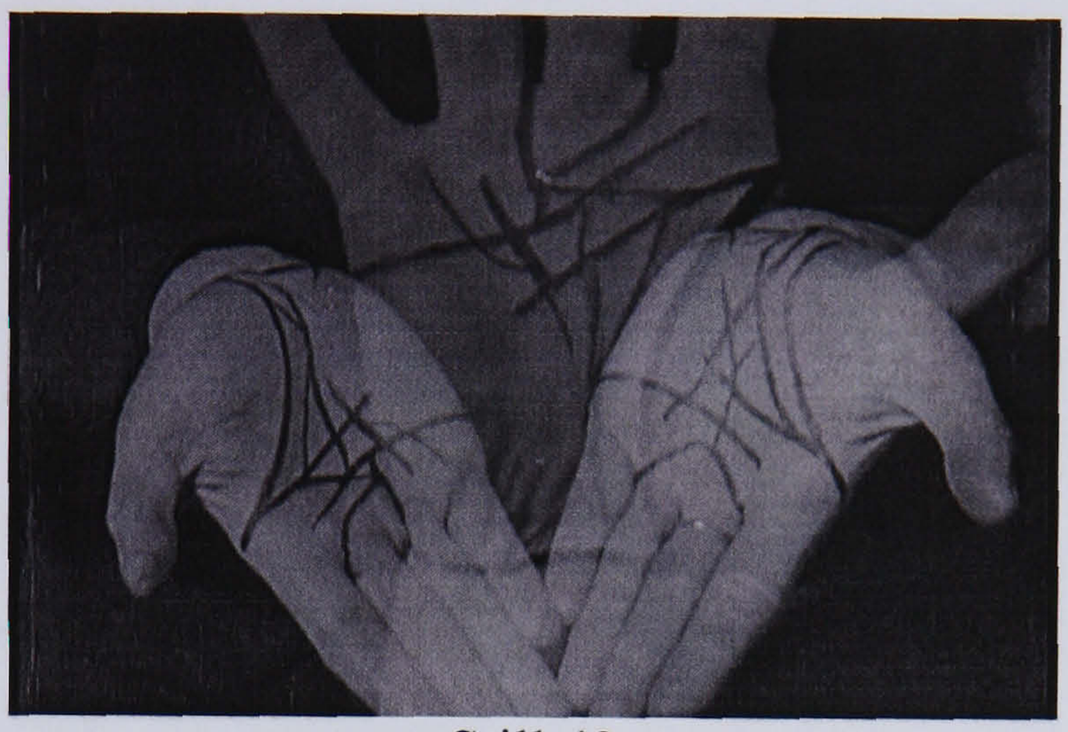

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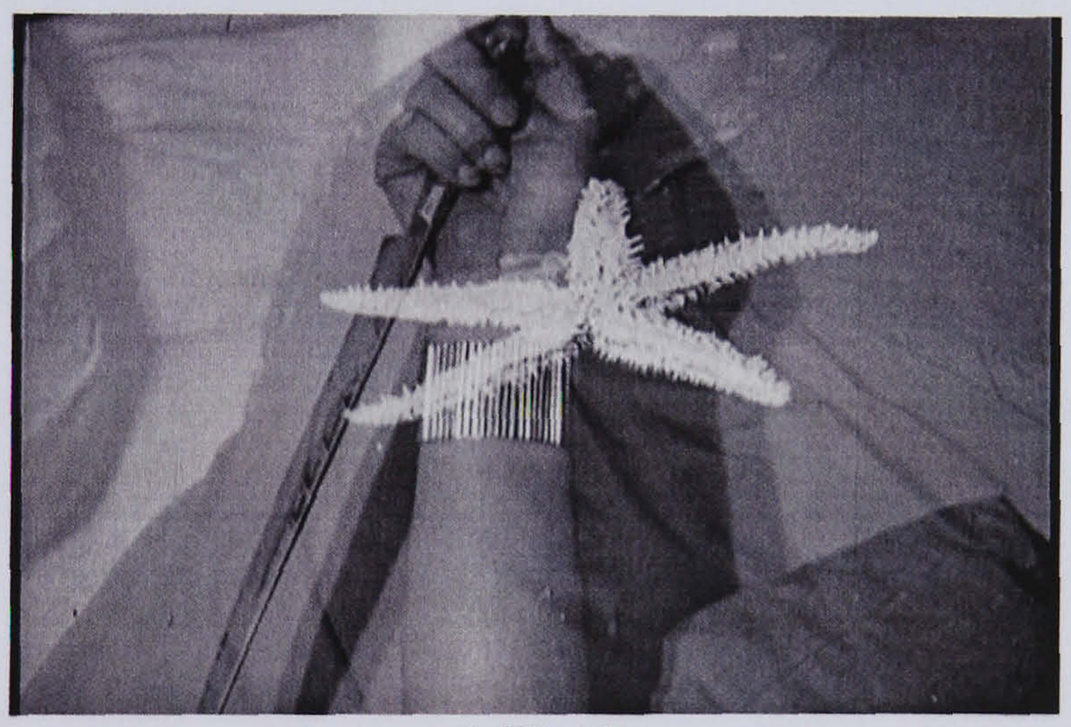

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CHAPTER FOUR

Film, poetry and architecture: *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* (1929)

Les Mystères du Château du Dé, the fourth and final film, is the least discussed of Man Ray's cinematic oeuvre. Unlike *Le Retour à la raison*, *Emak Bakia* and *L'Etoile de mer*, which are often deemed to be the most important avant-garde works of the period, there are very few in-depth analyses of *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, leading to its placement on the margins not only of Man Ray's involvement with the moving image but also of experimental film in general. As I have pointed out in the introduction, many descriptions and short surveys of Man Ray's cinematic period only mention his first three films, reducing the status of *Les Mystères* to that of a forgotten finale, a seriously undervalued conclusion to a unified body of works. Despite their resistance to straightforward categorisation, an aspect to which the previous chapters have drawn attention, these earlier films are often viewed within the theoretical frameworks of Dada and Surrealism, making them important examples of the way the principles of these movements can be expressed cinematically (even if the principles themselves are filtered through Man Ray's idiosyncratic artistic lens). *Les Mystères* on the other hand, demonstrates a rather more problematic positioning, one that seems to have cut it off from the rest of his cinematic work. However, as this chapter attempts to outline, this is a rather false perception that stems from the over-reliance on Dada and Surrealism as guiding factors in the understanding of Man Ray's cinematic expression. This final film in fact brings together a number of formal concerns found in the previous works, whilst also demonstrating more than any of these films Man Ray's characteristic interdisciplinary approach.

As well as being the film that attracts the least attention, *Les Mystères* is also the most misunderstood of Man Ray's films, a direct result of its extremely hybrid nature and the diverse range of concerns expressed by it. Barbara Rose, for example, refers to it as "Man Ray's most preposterous and pretentious film," claiming it to be "full of heavy references to Mallarmé's line, "A throw of the dice can never abolish chance."" She further states: "Essentially a sophisticated home movie made for the amusement of the idle rich, the Château de Dé suggests the malingering ennui of

Axel's Castle with its "shall-we-go?," "shall-we-stay?," and "what-difference-does-it-make-anyhow-since-life-is-just-a-game?" dialogue."[1] Made as a commission by the Vicomte de Noailles to document his recently constructed modernist villa in the south of France, *Les Mystères* in some ways functions as an architectural record, one that, in contrast to the earlier films, was never meant to be screened publicly. It is perhaps the clearly discernable trace of the commission that has led to such critical ambivalence. Although his earlier film, *Emak Bakia*, had been the result of a commission by Arthur Wheeler, the artist was given complete freedom in terms of both subject and formal approach. Except for certain scenes that were created voluntarily in and around the Wheelers' home in Biarritz, there are few clues to its financial origins and the film functions rather as a highly personal piece of cinematic expression. Likewise, the two later films that Noailles was to subsidise, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *L'Age d'Or* (1930) and Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930), were entirely open projects with none of the constraints that characterise the project undertaken by Man Ray at the villa.

Les Mystères was made specifically *for* and *about* the Noailles. It was intended to be their own personal showcase – showing their newly constructed house, the collection of art works as well as themselves and their guests. Charles de Noailles was a patron of the arts and therefore would have expected an original and creative interpretation of his request (hence his choice of Man Ray) yet the fact remains that the film was indeed intended as a kind of home-movie, an inferior form of the medium. When J. H. Matthews states that, "all in all, in this film, his last, Man Ray failed to take full advantage of Noailles's generosity," he clearly neglects to take the conditions of the commission into consideration.[2] Therefore, if *Les Mystères* initially appears to depart from the concerns expressed in Man Ray's earlier works it is specifically due to these conditions of the commission and the pre-defined subject of the villa. Yet *Les Mystères* is much more than a home-movie or even a film about architecture. It is Man Ray's interpretation, his visualisation, of the modernist material with which he was presented and to which he brought his own concerns, motifs and, most importantly, his unique artistic vision. It blurs the boundaries

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[1] Barbara Rose, "Kinetic Solutions to Pictorial Problems: The Films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy," *Artforum*, September 1991, p. 71.
[2] J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 83.

between documentary and fiction, reality and fantasy, objective and subjective vision, whilst blending concerns related to film, architecture and literature in a truly modernist fashion. In perhaps the most detailed and sustained discussion of *Les Mystères*, Helmut Wiehsmann describes it as "a film poem about architecture."[3]

This final film represents a crucial stage in Man Ray's filmmaking period, not simply because it can, in some ways, be seen as a conclusion to his brief foray into the medium, but also because it brings together a number of elements from his previous films, demonstrating an interesting trajectory of development. There is, once again, the acceptance of a commission, allowing comparisons to be made with *Emak Bakia*, in the sense that the circumstances of the filming provided Man Ray with a relatively defined context from which he developed a range of visual concerns. The key element here is the interplay of pre-planning and spontaneity, a situation he seemed to particularly relish. Both commissions involved a journey from Paris to the south of France, which Man Ray uses to imbue the films with a sense of 'otherness'. *Emak Bakia* is characterised by an aura of Mediterranean exoticism, whilst *Les Mystères* centres on the attempt to create an element of mystery that is directly related to the location around which the film is based. In its extensive use of inter-titles, *Les Mystères* also demonstrates an interaction with text, continuing an interest already established in *L'Etoile de mer*. Whilst the earlier film creates a link with Surrealist poetry through the use of a script by Robert Desnos, the later work draws on the work of the Symbolist poet, Stephane Mallarmé. The title, *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, along with a number of its textual inserts function as a direct reference to Mallarmé's poem, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard.*

The previous chapter discusses at length Man Ray's interest in literature and the important relationship between word and image in *L'Etoile de mer*. These concerns continue to be expressed in *Les Mystères* despite the significantly different circumstances in which it was made. His experience of the collaboration with Robert Desnos and his new awareness of the possibilities for the use of text as an integral part of visual representation clearly affected his approach to a film that was originally conceived as a kind of documentary. It is within these realms that the extremely hybrid form of *Les Mystères* is most strongly felt, since the poetic nature

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[3] "Ein "Filmgedicht "Helmut Weihsmann. *Cinetecture: Film, Architektur, Moderne* (Wein: PVS Verleger, 1995), p. 85.

of the textual inserts contributes to the reality/fantasy dichotomy that characterises the film. The interrelationship between text and image can be seen in Man Ray's early conception of the film. In a letter to Noailles, accepting the terms of the commission, he writes: "I should begin by getting one of my literary friends to prepare a scenario taking into account the location and ap[p]roximate number of people involved. This scenario need not be a coherent story but offer a field for original plastic or optical effects."[4] As has previously been noted, it is highly probable that Man Ray was thinking specifically of Desnos and the process by which his previous film was structured around the poet's written indications. Thus, this section of the letter to Noailles also serves to corroborate the argument made in the chapter on *L'Etoile de mer* that Desnos's surrealist scenario served as a basis for Man Ray's visual explorations. The reference to the use of a literary scenario not as a clear narrative outline but as a framework facilitating visual experimentation reflects the collaborative process involved in the making of that particular film. A similar coexistence of literary and visual concerns was clearly envisaged for *Les Mystères*, attesting to the gradual development of the artist's cinematic sensibility.

Whether or not Man Ray did approach Desnos, or indeed any other of his Surrealist, friends for the writing of a scenario remains uncertain. What we do know, however, is that the film followed some kind of written outline that was sent to all those involved before the shooting commenced and which Noailles described in a letter to the Duchesse of Ayen as seeming "un peu abracadabrant."[5] In his autobiography, Man Ray describes the travelling sequence at the beginning of the film, stating: "Although mostly improvised it fitted in with the script. After the start, not knowing what I was heading for, it seemed to me that I had successfully created an air of mystery."[6] Unlike the existing documents that allow us to look further into the making of *L'Etoile de mer*, no such scenario remains for *Les Mystères* and it must be assumed, from the comments by Noailles and Man Ray, that it was little more than a shooting script, woven together by a rough narrative outline. It seems likely then that the subtitles that appear throughout the film and which provide it

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[4] Letter from Man Ray to Charles de Noailles in *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, eds. Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas (Paris: Editions de Centre Pompidou, 1997)., p. 103.
[5] Charles de Noailles in a letter to the Duchesse of Ayen, in Bouhours and De Haas (eds.), *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies,* p. 109.
[6] Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1998), p. 226.

with a very literary flavour were added after the filming took place, suggesting a process quite different to the one that characterises the previous film. However, the similarity between the two films in this respect lies in the fact that the subtitles go beyond narrative description and often take on a poetic quality of their own, which, whilst occasionally commenting on the 'action' or visual information, are in no way restricted to this function. Although some of the text in *Les Mystères* has a descriptive purpose, it nonetheless retains a lyrical quality.

This chapter takes as one of its major focal points the exploration of the relationship between Mallarmé's poem and Man Ray's film through the representation of space. By comparing certain formal characteristics of the poem with those of the film, I will argue that the building of spatial awareness and the concretisation of space is the key point of convergence. I will also explore the way Man Ray's use of image and text formulates certain questions related to the modernist ideology of space and progress, particularly in terms of the interaction of the body with its surroundings. With *Les Mystères* Man Ray moves completely out of the studio and fully explores the possibilities of natural space. Whilst sections of *Emak Bakia* were shot on location and can be seen to exploit the formal possibilities of the Mediterranean surroundings, they are ultimately anchored by and juxtaposed with images derived from studio-based compositions. Similarly, although a large majority of *L'Etoile de mer* also involves non-studio shooting, Man Ray rarely concentrates on the qualities of depth and perspective that so characterise *Les Mystères* and which demonstrate a new awareness of the medium. It is also in this film that the camera is given greater freedom of movement, breaking away from the predominantly static position of the previous films. Although, as Chapter two discusses, *Emak Bakia* already sees Man Ray experimenting with different forms of movement, camera mobility is explored much more extensively in *Les Mystères*. If *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia* concentrate to a large extent on the destruction of spatial perspective through techniques of abstraction and distortion, Man Ray's last film involves an investigation of the whole spectrum of cinematic space through camera movement, framing and positioning.

From Architecture to Film: The Villa and the Commission

Although each of Man Ray's four films emerged from specific circumstances which, to a large extent contribute to the nature of the final product, the number of external elements that entered into the conception and construction of *Les Mystères* make it a richly layered work and perhaps the most interesting example of Man Ray's trans-artistic sensibility. For this reason, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the project and the personalities involved before discussing in detail the particular formal qualities of the film.

A Modernist Project

In 1923, wealthy aristocrats, Charles and Marie-Laures de Noailles, commissioned the architect Robert Mallet-Stevens to design a winter house, which would be built in Hyères on the Mediterranean coast. As Noailles remembers in a letter to Mallet-Stevens some years later, the request specified, "une maison infiniment pratique et simple où chaque chose serait combinée au seul point de vue de l'utilité."[7] The expansive villa, constructed in stages and completed in 1928, was a testimony to the modernist spirit in architecture, bringing together the most recent tendencies in the arts. It is perhaps for this reason that Noailles was eager to commit the building to film, a medium that could provide both a documentary record of the grounds whilst at the same time adding another artistic dimension to what was already an impressive creative achievement. He first approached Marcel L'Herbier's production company, which led to a film by Jacques Manuel entitled *Biceps et bijoux*. This short piece, with a "vague fil narratif," was centred primarily in and around the swimming pool situated on the ground floor of the villa. Unconvinced by the artistic merits of Manuel's film, Noailles approached Man Ray at the beginning of 1929 with an offer to join him and a number of other guests for a few weeks at the villa that coming winter. The offer came with the condition that he would bring his movie camera and shoot some scenes of the villa and of the guests engaging in various activities.

Despite Man Ray's reluctance to involve himself in any more filmmaking projects, having previously decided to give up working with the medium, he was

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[7] Letter from Charles de Noailles to Robert Mallet-Stevens, 19 April 1925, quoted in Cécile Briolle, Agnès Fuzibet, Gérard Monnier, *Mallet-Stevens: La Villa Noailles* (Marseille: Editions Parenthèses, 1990), p. 11.

attracted by the loose conditions of the commission and the opportunity that it provided for a holiday in the south of France. Man Ray was reassured by the fact that the film was to be the private property of the Vicomte and would not be screened publicly. He was already beginning to resent the fact he was now being considered as having turned his interests to movie making and no doubt felt a certain liberty in making a film for which there would be no artistic pressure. However, as he points out in his autobiography, although he had planned to approach the film in terms of a straightforward documentary, an "easy, mechanical job" that "required no inventiveness," a photograph of the grounds given to him by Noailles before his departure stimulated his imagination and altered his perception of the project:

> Before leaving for the south to open up his château, Noailles gave me a photograph of it – a conglomeration of gray cement cubes built on the ruins of an old monastery on the top of a hill overlooking the town and the sea. Designed by a well-known architect of the day, Mallet-Stevens, it was severe and unobtrusive as if trying to hide the opulence that was housed in it. In spite of myself, my mind began to work, imagining various approaches to the subject; after all, it would be best to make some sort of plan if only not to waste effort. The cubic forms of the château brought to mind the title of a poem by Mallarmé: "A Throw of the Dice Can Never Do Away With Chance." This would be the theme of the film, and its title: *The Mystery of the Château of the Dice*.[8]

Architecture, then, provided the principle creative stimulus and the main themes around which the film would pivot. As we shall see, the formal properties of the villa and its contradictory connotations highlighted here by Man Ray dictate to a large extent the overall approach to the project. The filming began at the beginning of January 1929, and lasted for about two weeks. Noailles was delighted with the finished film and a private screening was organised at their home in Paris for the 1st May of the same year. Another private showing, organised by the Surrealists, took place at the Studio des Ursulines on 12th June, along with Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien andalou* (1929), and was followed by a number of public projections throughout the year.[9] Noailles' enthusiasm for the film as well as the high esteem in which he held Man Ray's artistic talent led to an offer of financial backing for a feature-length film with no restrictions. Man Ray declined. To go from making

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[8] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 226.
[9] Bouhours and De Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, p. 85.

short films, on which he worked almost independently, to enter into the arena of professional filmmaking seemed to him a massive leap, which would, above all, require him to collaborate with any number of industry specialists. The previous chapter draws particular attention to Man Ray's aversion to working with other people. Although it can be seen to feature to some extent in all of his films, the collaborations into which he entered were often those in which an artistic exchange could take place. However, *Les Mystères* demonstrates collaboration on a number of levels, principally in the bringing together of different personalities and creative approaches. If the commission involved a direct liaison between Man Ray and Charles de Noailles, it is also characterised, as demonstrated by the above quote, by a more indirect relationship between Man Ray and Mallet-Stevens.

Man Ray and Mallet-Stevens

Chapter 3 discusses the connection between Man Ray and the poet Robert Desnos, with whom he collaborated on the making of *L'Etoile de mer*, and outlines the way in which their respective interests in the arts of poetry and film provided the perfect conditions for an interdisciplinary exploration. A similar exchange can be seen at work in *Les Mystères* since, even if Man Ray and Mallet-Stevens were not official collaborators in the making of the film, they nonetheless shared certain preoccupations within the realms of both cinema and architecture, contributing to a similar fusion of ideas that clearly influenced the shape taken by the finished piece. Although there would appear to be little in Man Ray's work to link him with the field of architecture, his early passion and aptitude for mechanical drawing whilst at high school earned him a scholarship in architecture at Columbia University, which he declined in order to pursue his more passionate interest in painting. A number of drawings from this period demonstrate a studied composition of line and perspective. In later years, influenced by developments in Cubism, he began to focus attention instead on the flat surface of the canvas. In a pamphlet produced in 1916, *A Primer of the New Art of Two Dimensions*, Man Ray developed a theory of two-dimensional art in which he brought together painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature and dance by demonstrating their common "potential for reduction on a flat

surface."[10] In this treatise, he stated: "All architecture is based on the principle of proportion or scale, a purely plastic element adaptable to the flat plane and fully expressive of the architectural sense of the mind."[11] As we shall see later in this chapter, *Les Mystères* draws on this plastic element of architecture by concentrating on the way depth and perspective is expressed on the flat surface of the cinema screen, pushing to the foreground of his visual explorations the notion of filmic space. The cubist forms of Mallet-Stevens's architectural design thus seem to project Man Ray back to his earlier pictorial concerns, allowing him to finally expand these ideas into the medium of cinema, the only art form to which *A Primer* ... does not refer.

Robert Mallet-Stevens was more directly involved in the cinema than Man Ray was involved in architecture and, as such, his work expresses a much more profound interrelationship between the two arts. He was a member of the ciné-club, *Le Club des Amis du Septième Art*, founded in 1921 by Riciotto Canudo, which included many of the key avant-garde figures of the period, such as Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau and Fernand Léger.[12] In some ways echoing Delluc's notion of 'la photogénie'[13], Mallet-Stevens argued for the inherent suitability of modern architecture as cinematic subject, creating a strong link between the two arts: "L'architecture moderne est essentiellement photogénique: grands plans, lignes droites, sobriéte d'ornements, surfaces unies, opposition nette d'ombre et de lumière."[14] It is particularly this awareness of the cinematic possibilities of modern architecture's emphasis on light and shadow that links Mallet-Stevens to the

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[10] Francis M. Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Work of Man Ray* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 150.
[11] Man Ray, "A Primer of the New Art of Two Dimensions" (1916), reproduced in Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Work of Man Ray*, p. 225.
[12] *Le Club des Amis du Septième Art* provided an interdisciplinary forum for the discussion of ideas relating to the seventh art. Made up of filmmakers, actors, writers, artists, architects, musicians and critics, it was central to the development of avant-garde cinema in France. Writings by various members were published in the journal *Gazette des Sept Arts* and the club was active in the organisation of public screenings, exhibitions and conferences aimed at the promotion of cinema as art. Noureddine Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories* (Paris: Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1995), pp. 55-57. See also Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).
[13] The term 'photogénie', used for the first time by Louis Delluc in 1917, refers to the process in which an object takes on new expressive qualities when it becomes a cinematic image. It illustrates the ability of film to alter everyday perception through certain technical interventions such as lighting, focus, framing etc.
[14] Robert Mallet-Stevens, quoted in Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories*, p. 136.

concerns of Man Ray, and which in turn allows us to make connections between certain visual preoccupations of the latter and those of the early Impressionist filmmakers such as Dulac, Delluc and Epstein.

Like many architects of the period, Mallet-Stevens worked as a set-designer for a number of films and was therefore aware of the practical, as well as theoretical, implications in bringing together the two forms of expression. In 1925 he wrote: "It is undeniable that the cinema has a marked influence on modern architecture; in turn, modern architecture brings its artistic side to the cinema. Modern architecture does not only serve the cinematographic set (*décor*), but imprints its stamp on the staging (mise-en-scène), it breaks out of its frame; architecture 'plays.'"[15] This idea is clearly expressed in the exterior décor that was created for Marcel L'Herbier's film *L'Inhumaine* (1924), and which bears a striking resemblance to the villa Saint Bernard that Mallet-Stevens designed for the Noailles. The notion of architecture as taking on a role, rather than simply providing a background for the action, is a key characteristic of *Les Mystères*, perhaps the first film to be made in which architecture becomes the central 'actor', that is, not simply in a documentary sense, but precisely through an intimate camera-subject relationship that is traditionally reserved for the filming of characters and the expression of emotion. Thus, Man Ray's film both demonstrates and expands Mallet-Stevens' view by bringing architecture to centre-stage, not as a means to emphasise character emotion of the kind found in *L'Inhumaine*, but rather in *becoming* the character itself. As we will see later in this chapter, *Les Mystères* actually reverses the conventional relationship between characters and their surroundings through a process of de-familiarisation that contrasts starkly with the techniques of Expressionism, by which *L'Inhumaine* was influenced, in which the set takes on an expressive quality but still remains subservient to the communication of human emotion. In drawing out certain geometric patterns within the villa through camera movement and composition within the frame, Man Ray fuses his own visual concerns with those found in the architectural design of Mallet-Stevens and, in doing so, brings out the purely emotive qualities of the modernist space.

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[15] Robert Mallet-Stevens, quoted in Anthony Vidler, "The Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary." In: *Film Architecture: set designs from "Metropolis" to "Blade Runner*, ed. Dietrich Neumann, p. 14.

The film begins with the introductory text: "Comment deux voyageurs arrivèrent a Saint Bernard, et ce qu'ils virent dans les ruines d'un vieux Château, au-dessus desquelles s'élève un autre château de notre époque," followed by a series of images that could be seen in terms of a prologue. A set of car headlights are seen emerging out of the darkness, followed by a succession of images of the villa and the surrounding area coming closer into view through a series of dissolves. A pair of wooden hands, seen in close-up, play with a set of dice, creating a strong visual reference to the title of Mallarmé's poem. An inter-title "Loin de là, à Paris" serves to locate the subsequent action, whilst simultaneously creating a dichotomy between Paris and the 'elsewhere' of the previous image. The following sequence shows two men (Man Ray and his assistant Jacques-André Boiffard) in a bar rolling dice in order to decide whether or not to leave. They wear stockings over their heads, making their faces, and thus their expressions, imperceptible to the viewer. The decision to leave prompted by the result of the dice is followed by a series of exterior shots showing them getting into a car and driving away. In narrative terms, an attempt is made at imbuing the journey with a sense of mystery, represented in the two textual inserts "Où allons-nous?" and "Les portes de Paris s'ouvrent sur l'inconnu."

What follows is a relatively lengthy sequence representing their journey, filmed entirely from the moving car and consisting of a total of twenty-one separate shots. Although movement is a key element here, it is certainly not the only point of interest since a number of important visual concerns are developed, notably the play of light and shadow and the oscillation between abstraction and figuration. This section of *Les Mystères* strongly resembles Man Ray's earlier films in its collage-like construction of individual shots that each concentrate on a particular formal detail. The cement cubes that line the edge of the road at the beginning of the journey seem to look back to the geometric shapes of *Emak Bakia* (**Still 23**) whilst anticipating the the focus on geometric compositions in later sequences of the villa. The strangely truncated trees draw attention to the underlying element of abstraction in concrete reality, which, as a comparison with an untitled photograph from 1930 (**Fig. 21**) demonstrates, clearly fascinated Man Ray. Another interesting formal detail is the shot of a fence through which sunlight streams, creating a strobe-like effect. The

Figure 21.

vertical lines of the fence as they move across the screen (**Still 51**) create an almost identical effect to that in the sequence of distortions in *Emak Bakia* (**Still 15**).

The end of the journey and the arrival of the two men at a place of interest are signalled by a series of shots of a sculpture by Jacques Lipchitz – *J'aime le mouvement qui déplace les* formes – that is situated in the villa's 'triangular garden'. Using a technique of animation, Man Ray interprets the title of the statue by creating an impression of movement, again bringing to mind the earlier films and their concentration on sculputres or constructed objects in motion (we are also reminded here of the 1920 photograph *Moving Sculpture*). The subsequent sequence represents, in terms of the commission, the most important aspect of the film since it constitutes the documentary record of the villa itself, beginning outside with the camera meticulously picking out the unusual structures and angles of the building. Unlike the representation of the journey, which is heavily edited to provide a series of different visual impressions, this section is characterised by the presence of sequence shots that builds a gradual awareness of the architectural intricacies of the villa. This is followed by a similar exploration of the interiors. Here the filming is less objective and the presence of the camera is felt more clearly, being positioned at different levels and carrying out more diverse and erratic movements. A number of inter-titles suggest a search for signs of life, insisting on the emptiness of the place. Certain objects are singled out and become the focus of individual sequences: a stained glass window, a sink fitted with removable cover, various sculptures and racks of paintings (with only the reverse side of the pictures visible to the viewer).

After these sections of exterior and interior exploration another set of 'characters' are introduced, this time the inhabitants of the villa. However, their role as characters in the traditional sense is suspect from the outset, not only because, like the two travellers seen at the beginning, their faces are obscured by stockings, but also due to the way the subtitles introduce them as a kind of strange, unknown species occupying a "hidden corner" of the castle's grounds and playing, childlike, with a pair of oversized dice (which also function to highlight their impishness). The camera then follows them engaging in various sporting activities, dominated by a sequence that takes place in the swimming pool, clearly designed to demonstrate the aquatic skills of Noailles and his wife Marie-Laure, whom Man Ray describes in his

autobiography as "expert swimmers." It is at this point in the film that the role of the textual insert takes on a greater significance, not simply commenting on the action but rather becoming significant in its own right giving rise to particular moments where the text seems to have only a tenuous relationship with the image. Then, as the actions of the characters (played variously by Charles and Marie-Laure Noailles, Eveline Orlowska, Bernard Deshoulières and Alice de Montgomery, Marcel Raval and the count and countess of Ursel) become gradually more choreographed and formally composed, the inter-titles simultaneously become less frequent, with the focus again becoming that of the exclusively visual.

After the second temporal inter-title announcing the second day, another pair of travellers, this time a man and woman (Etienne de Beaumont and Lily Pastré), arrive by chance at the castle. A travelling shot showing the grounds of the Château perhaps suggests their point of view or quite simply the idea of travel. Upon finding the abandoned dice, the couple, like the other characters before them, put their destiny in the hands of chance and let the dice decide whether or not they should stay. Thus the "On part? On ne part pas?" dilemma of the two travellers who begin the film is mirrored by the "On reste? On ne reste pas" of those featured here. They climb to the summit of the castle, undress and begin to dance, whereupon they become frozen in time, presented as statues. Man Ray transfers the image from positive to negative, making their bodies appear white against a black background. The wooden hands seen at the very beginning reappear to conclude the film. For the purposes of analysis, *Les Mystères* can be divided into four relatively distinct sections: first of all there is the journey that the two travellers make from Paris, which provides the motivation for the subsequent series of more or less self-contained formal exercises. Secondly, there is the documentary-like exploration of the castle, which again provides Man Ray with a pretext to develop and experiment with different styles of filming. The third section concentrates on the activities of the guests, whilst the fourth, albeit shorter and less individually succinct section ends the film with the arrival and immortalisation of a second set of travellers.

Situating *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*

Before discussing the main concerns of *Les Mystères* in detail, I shall first outline the historical and discursive context that has significantly affected its reception and its situation within avant-garde film studies. This will be useful in understanding the very limited parameters to which analyses of the film are often restricted. As is the case with all of Man Ray's cinematic works, the main problem that has presented itself in previous discussion of *Les Mystères* is that of how and where to place it in the context of avant-garde activity of the period. Despite being considered by the Surrealists with a certain amount of scepticism at the time of their release (and, as I have argued in previous chapters, continue to raise an element of doubt in terms of categorisation), the earlier films, *Emak Bakia* and *L'Etoile de mer*, ultimately found their way into André Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Dictionnaire abrégé du mouvement surréaliste*[16], although as Robert Short has suggested, these inclusions were probably made to compensate for the dearth of truly 'Surrealist' productions, by "bumping up the roster."[17] In 1951, Breton would express his regret at the ultimate failure of the cinema – the medium that had seemed to offer the most potential – to realise the Surrealist hopes of a revolutionary form of visual expression: "For my part it would be to gainsay myself, to disavow what conditions me in my own eyes, what appears to affect me beyond measure, to disown, as is customary, the disappointments wrought by the cinema, that form of expression one has been able to believe in to a degree greater than any other called upon to promote 'real life.'"[18] This disappointment, which must have already been felt as early as the 1930s, along with Man Ray's continued loyalty through the most testing years of Surrealism during which many of the group's members were thrown out for political or artistic treachery, undoubtedly led Breton to reconsider his earlier severity as to what constituted Surrealist expression in the cinema.[19] However, his later revisions did not

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[16] André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Dictionnaire abregé du mouvement surréaliste* (Paris: José Corti, 1938).
[17] Robert Short, *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema* (New York: Creation Books, 2002), p. 20.
[18] André Breton, "Comme dans un bois." *L'Âge du cinéma*, nos. 4-5, August-November 1951. Reprinted as "As in a wood" in *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, Third Edition, trans. and ed. Paul Hammond (San Franciso: City Lights Books, 2000), p. 72.
[19] The rarely discussed relationship between Man Ray and André Breton is a complex and intricate affair that seems to have been characterised by mutual respect. Although Man Ray was a key member of the Surrealist group, he maintained a high level of artistic independence, sparing him Breton's

stretch as far as the inclusion of *Les Mystères*, an omission that seems to have relegated the film to an inferior position, already referred to at the beginning of this chapter, not only in relation to Man Ray's cinematic output but also within the context of contemporaneous filmmaking. The circumstances out of which the film emerged and its close connection with the modernist architectural project, as well as earlier avant-garde filmmaking practices against which Surrealism was positioned, are clearly significant in understanding its ambiguous status. It is not only a film that defies genre classification (i.e., documentary, fiction, home-movie), but also one, which, more importantly given its historical positioning, seems to evade stylistic definition.

The above section recounts that the film, on completion, was not projected in isolation. The first screenings were accompanied by *Un Chien andalou*, Buñuel and Dalí's short piece that was produced in the same year. In *Histoire du mouvement surréaliste*, Gerard Durozoi provides an impression of the impact made by this film on the surrealist content of Man Ray's cinematic essays: "À la fin de l'été 1929, une projection privée du film de Dali et Buñuel *Un Chien andalou* est organisée chez les Noailles, à laquelle assistent Breton et d'autres membres du Groupe. Ils en sont enthousiasmés: jamais le cinéma n'a atteint une violence ou une cruauté comparable, et par rapport au film de Buñuel, les essais de Man Ray paraissent eux-mêmes bien timides."[20] Jean-Michel Bouhours echoes this perspective, with a more direct reference to the impact on the way in which *Les Mystères* itself is perceived: "sorti au même moment qu'*Un chien andalou*, *Les Mystères* …, dont les images photogéniques de Man Ray sont empreintes d'une poésie légère, fait parfois pâle figure devant la puissance des images de Buñuel et Dalí.[21] Through these two comments, we can understand the way in which the viewing of Man Ray's film was (and still is) affected by the concurrent release of Buñuel and Dalí's now infamous first film. Their second cinematic collaboration, *L'Age d'or* as well as Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poête*, both also funded by the Vicomte de Noailles, appeared the following year. The films by Buñuel in particular signalled a new kind of avant-

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ritualistic condemnation that befell many of the members such as Robert Desnos, Philippe Soupault, Antonin Artaud, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, André Masson and Salvador Dalí.

[20] Gerard Durozoi. *Histoire du mouvement surréaliste* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 1997), p. 187.

[21] Jean-Michel Bouhours, "Les Mystères du Château du Dé." In *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, eds, Bouhours and De Haas p. 90.

garde filmmaking, one that outwardly rejected the formal aestheticism of the previous wave of artist/filmmakers. These films suggested a new possibility for surrealist expression whilst simultaneously opening up previously undiscovered avenues of cinematic construction that did not consist in the outright rejection of traditional codes and conventions but precisely on exploiting these conventions to create a psychological rather than formal effect.

Jacques B. Brunius has referred to this period as the dissolution of the cinematic avant-garde, "the fourth and last period … that saw both the culmination and disintegration of this spirit of adventure."[22] Drawing attention to the difference between the previous concerns of the avant-garde film and those of this new form of expression represented primarily by *Un Chien andalou*, Brunius observes that the latter "reasserted the importance of the anecdote, and discarded all virtuosity that added nothing to the subject. The whole effort of Dali and Buñuel bore on the *content* of the film, and they loaded it with all their obsessions, all the images of their personal mythology, deliberately made it violent and harrowing. As for the container, Buñuel gave it the simplest possible form …"[23] From this perspective, the Surrealist films of this period signalled once and for all the abandon of concerns related to medium-specificity developed by the first wave of abstract and Impressionist filmmakers and still present to some extent in the later Dada-related films of Fernand Leger, René Clair and, of course, Man Ray. However, in relation to the comment by Brunius, we must question whether the separation of form and content to which he refers is at all possible, since the two are inextricably linked even in the least formally concerned films. This issue has been raised by Linda Williams in her discussion of Surrealist film, which highlights the misconception that the Surrealists' approach to film necessarily involved a rejection of form in favour of content.[24]

The consequences of this misconception can be seen in Brunius' statement that, "*Un Chien Andalou* came just in time to shake the blind confidence in the lens, the cameraman, and laboratory tricks, which had fostered the habit of forgetting to

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[22] Jacques B. Brunius, "Experimental Film in France." In: *Experiment in the Film*, ed. Roger Manvell. (London: Grey Walls, 1949), p. 98

[23] Ibid, p. 99.

[24] Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 25.

endow scenes with any meaning at all."[25] The argument thus becomes clearer: formally determined explorations and self-reflexive strategies that focus attention towards the nature of vision and cinematic representation, Brunius seems to suggest, are without meaning, since meaning exists exclusively on the level of content. This is indeed a view expressed by Leon Moussinac, who at the time of the film's release wrote:

> C'est l'aspect plastique des images, l'expression intime de celles-ci qui intéresse tout spécialement Man Ray, admirable photographe. Rien de ce qui fait une composition cinématographique, de ce qui commande au rythme d'un film, rien des rapports mathématiques des images entre elles ne semble le retenir. C'est une architecture "au jugé", qui garde le charme de son incertitude, mais qui ne manque pas, souvent, d'être un peu lassante, et nous apparaît comme un divertissement inutile. Seule la séduction agit sur l'aspect plastique des images, la volonté et l'esprit qui s'y relèvent, mais ça n'est pas suffisant en cinématographie.[26]

What Moussinac seems to find most dubious about Man Ray's approach in *Les Mystères* is the kind of formal introspection that characterised abstract, Impressionist and, to an extent, Dada cinema, and against which Surrealism was positioned. Moussinac had been an early supporter of French Impressionism and a friend of Louis Delluc, who, throughout the 1920s, became gradually more aligned with the theories of the Russian Soviet filmmakers, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. By 1929, he was criticising the films of the French avant-garde for their lack of structure and excessive concentration on pictorial values and ultimately claimed in 1933 that: "because it envisioned the problem according to the point of view of aesthetics only, because it wanted to ignore the economic laws which determined it, the avant-garde is dead."[27] For Moussinac, simply pushing the limits of cinematic conventions for purely aesthetic purposes did not amount to an advancement of the medium but rather stunted its true creative possibilities. Although he praises the aesthetic beauty of Man Ray's images, he suggests that what are admirable and pleasing effects in a photograph are not powerful enough in cinematography. Of course, this final statement must surely depend on what is understood by 'cinematography'. It seems

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[25] Ibid, p. 99-100.
[26] Louis Moussinac, quoted in Bouhours, "Les Mystères du Château du Dé," p. 90-91.
[27] Quoted in Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*, p. 274.

clear that by 1929, a new approach to cinematic expression was establishing itself through a number of French critics who, like Moussinac, were becoming aware of the revolutionary potential of film. The increasing popularity of the Soviet theories of montage as well as the new direction of Surrealist film signalled by the collaborative efforts of Buñuel and Dalí focused attention away from the formal experiments of the previous years. Man Ray was aware of the critical position in relation to his films and, years later, would attempt to counter Moussinac's statement, arguing "il ne m'intéresse pas de faire de la "belle photo" au cinema."[28] Although he does not explicitly refer to the criticisms of his overly aesthetic cinematic approach, they are nonetheless implicitly suggested.

If the kind of expression found in Man Ray's film does indeed seem far from the revolutionary fervour of the Russian experiments in montage or the violent images of *Un Chien andalou*, it does not necessarily equate to the empty formalism referred to by both Brunius and Moussinac. *Les Mystères* is not an attempt at a Surrealist film, even though it contains numerous elements that express a Surrealist sensibility. As I have already highlighted, it bears more of a resemblance to Man Ray's early works, in the sense that it, as Inez Hedges points out, "returns to the abstract study of shapes and moving forms, despite a rudimentary story line." Hedges argues that "perhaps because of the absence of Desnos as collaborator, one can find few Surrealist elements."[29] It is, nevertheless, these very elements to which descriptions and definitions of the film tend to point, attesting to a particular quality that deserves attention. Mario Verdone, for example, has referred to *Les Mystères* as a "typico film surrealista, con elementi immaginari e reali,"[30] whilst Sheldon Renan employs the term, "surrealist mystery film," [31] to evoke the aura or atmosphere of Surrealism, without necessarily relating it to the psychological violence of other forms of Surrealist expression. What these statements seem to highlight, crucially, is the inadequacy of the term 'Surrealist' to describe a film that approaches but ultimately evades the fundamental aims of the movement. Verdone's generalisation

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[28] Man Ray, "Témoignages," in *Surrréalisme et cinéma*, special issue of *Etudes Cinématographiques*, nos 38-39, Paris, 1965, p. 43.
[29] Inez Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer*." In: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph E. Kuenzli (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 107-8.
[30] Mario Verdone, *Le avanguardie storiche del cinema* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1977), p. 45.
[31] Sheldon Renan, *The Underground Film* (London: Studio Vista, 1967), p. 64.

of the film's fusion of real and imaginary elements as constituting a typical example of Surrealism and Renon's attempt to open up the category by relating it to vague notions of mystery and strangeness underline the phenomenon of taking a part for the whole that would seem to be a common problem in the use of Surrealism as a critical tool. Just as Man Ray's film involves more than a fusion of reality with imagination, the notion of Surrealism also goes beyond such a simplified process.

Man Ray was clearly inspired by his contacts with the Surrealist movement but, like most areas of his work, his artistic expression brings Surrealist elements into a fusion with other concerns, most often related to the exploration and solving of formal problems. As a result, Surrealism exists as only one of a number of preoccupations and any attempt to fix the film to such a singular interpretation is inevitably met with frustration. The way the film initiates a subtle transformation of reality is, in other accounts, described in terms of the fantastic, which crucially avoids the strict alignment of the film with the processes of Surrealism. This is the path taken by Peter Weiss, who states: "Man Ray fait subir à la réalité quelques métamorphoses. Il nous montre, par exemple, des membres de la haute société, couchés sur le plancher, et sur lesquels jouent des ombres fantastiques."[32] Iannis Katsahnias highlights similar qualities when he refers to "des reflets et des ombres qui touchent au fantastique."[33] The important factor here is the way the 'fantastic' and the merging of reality with fantasy are related specifically to the film's formal characteristics, such as the play of light, rather than any particular narrative content. This is a feature of Ado Kyrou's summary of the film, in which certain details such as the covered faces of the characters and the cubist décor are described as producing "des effets éminemment insolites."[34] Similarly, A. L. Rees refers to the "repeated empty rooms" of *Les Mystères* in terms of Man Ray's 'cinema of refusal', suggesting the important link between the film and the architecture of the villa. [35]. It is here that the extent of the need to consider the film as situated *between* the forces of modernist formalism and Surrealism becomes evident, since Man Ray draws out both the formal and psychological impact of Mallet-Stevens' architecture.

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[32] Peter Weiss, *Cinéma d'avant-garde* (Paris: L'Arche: 1989), p. 37.
[33] Iannis Katsahnias, 'Le Chasseur de Lumière,'*Cahiers du Cinéma* (390) Dec 1986, p. 47.
[34] Ado Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1963), p. 176
[35] A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 43

In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton evokes an imaginary space, a metaphor with multiple functions that he uses to outline the dynamics of the movement and its members in relation to the wider context of society within which and against which it operates.

> For today I think of a *castle*, half of which is not necessarily in ruins; this castle belongs to me, I picture it in a rustic setting, not far from Paris. The outbuildings are too numerous to mention, and, as for the interior, it has been frightfully restored in such a manner as to leave nothing to be desired from the viewpoint of comfort. Automobiles are parked before the door, concealed by the shade of trees. A few of my friends are living here as permanent guests.[36]

What is interesting about this description is the extent to which Breton's space resembles that represented some years later in *Les Mystères*, evoking exactly the same kind of juxtaposition between the old and new that so fascinated Man Ray and to a large extent defined his approach to the film.[37] The space created by Breton brings together past and present, the ruins of the castle contrasting with its modernist transformation. The scepticism with which this 'frightful' restoration is approached is also reflected in *Les Mystères*, where the formally detached architecture and empty rooms give rise to a sense of malaise and foreboding. Against this background, human presence is represented as depersonalised, becoming gradually absorbed into and overtaken by the architectural surroundings, an area that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. This aspect of the film has been related to the Surrealist spaces of De Chirico, offering a valuable perspective on the correspondences between Man Ray's cinematic expression and certain visual tendencies of the movement. However, as I shall demonstrate, these concerns remain intricately tied to formal explorations. In order to understand this duality I shall now

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[36] André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 16-7.
[37] Breton most strongly represents the Surrealist nostalgia for the past through his praise for the outmoded. This can be seen particularly in his descriptions in both *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou* of his weekly visits to the flea markets on the outskirts of Paris. Although, as Ian Walker has observed, none of the other members of the Surrealist group wrote about flea markets, an examination of Surrealist-related photography of the period reveals a large amount of images focusing on precisely this subject. *City gorged with dreams: Surrealism and documentary photography in interwar Paris* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 124.

turn towards another important literary source with which the film is more directly linked.

Un coup de dés …

In many ways, the most evident connection with Surrealism can be found in Man Ray's use of Mallarmé's modernist poem, *Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, as a key source of inspiration. The symbolist work was a favourite amongst the Surrealist group, along with works by Apollinaire, Lautréamont and Rimbaud. Most important, in the context of this discussion, is the way this text expresses a link between Surrealism and formalism. In a lecture delivered in Prague in 1935, André Breton praises Mallarmé for having created a poem "in which visual elements take their place between the words without ever duplicating them."[38] He refers to systems of poetic construction employed by Mallarmé and by Apollinaire in his *Calligrammes* in terms of a "systematic derangement of all the senses," exactly the kind of derangement that was vital to the Surrealist project. Indeed, one of the most striking effects of Mallarmé's poem is the formal arrangement of the text on the page and the breaking up of traditional poetic structure (the twelve-syllable alexandrine). The various word groupings, spread seemingly randomly across the poem's 24 pages and presented in contrasting sizes and typeface, express purely formal relationships. The normal processes of signification are rendered problematic since words and phrases often do not flow naturally from one section to another, producing the 'derangement' of which Breton speaks so highly. As in Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, the words themselves are freed from the conventional systems of meaning and different qualities are brought into the process that work towards the notion of 'pure poetry'.[39] As we shall see, certain moments of *Les Mystères* can be associated to a similar derangement of the senses by altering the way in which we experience external reality. As I have argued in chapter two, this is a crucial aspect of Man Ray's expression that seems to overlap with the Surrealist practice, whilst ultimately treading a formally determined path.

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[38] André Breton, "Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935) in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 263.
[39] The idea of 'pure poetry' originates with Edgar Allan Poe and was taken up enthusiastically by the French Symbolist poets. It refers to a kind of poetry that avoids representations of the exterior world by turning attention towards the very language of poetry, such as the phonetic and visual properties of the words.

... jamais n'abolira le hasard

Through the central role played by the title within the text of the film, the formal structure of the poem is related to the notion of chance, that aspect of creative production so dear to the Surrealists. The random appearance of the poem and its insistence on unconventional groupings of words seem to represent an early example of what Breton and his followers would later develop as automatic writing. Yet, Mallarmé was only interested in the paradoxical nature of chance and the extent to which it enters into a relationship with and reveals patterns of logic and reason. This is clearly evident in the perplexing double nature of the title, which even suggests the cancelling out of chance. As Dee Reynolds explains:

> The poem's semantics clearly invite a questioning between order and chance. The use of the verb 'n'abolira' in the title phrase suggests an opposition between 'un coup de dés' and 'le hasard' [...] whereas in fact the two are etymologically equivalent, 'hasard' being derived from the Arabic 'az-zahr', meaning 'le dé' [...] The emphasis on the theme of 'le nombre' suggests that the numerical structure of 'le vers' is itself caught up in the paradoxically interchangability of order and disorder, which illustrates the interconnectedness of all phenomena, where chance can throw up its own order.[40]

As the earlier chapter on *Le Retour à la raison* demonstrates, Man Ray's work expresses the complex and contradictory nature of chance. As an artist he was fully aware of the possibilities offered by submitting oneself to the laws of chance, but, like Mallarmé, he also understood the ways in which chance was inseparable from patterns of order. The contradictory quality of the title of Mallarmé's poem was undoubtedly the key source of attraction for Man Ray, whose own personality was characterised by a strong sense of contradiction. This is evidenced in the reproduction of the title within the film, the presentation of which mirrors the formal structure of the poem:

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[40] Dee Reynolds, "The Kinesthetics of Chance: Mallarmé's Un Coup de Dés and Avant-Garde Choreography." In: *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 96.

"Un coup de dés …

… jamais n'abolira

… LE HASARD"

Appearing in three separate inter-titles to the left, middle and right of the screen, as shown above, the title demonstrates Man Ray's attempt to create a cinematic interpretation of the poem. The inter-titles are alternated with shots of the castle's inhabitants throwing dice, further establishing the concentration on chance. Yet the incorporation of the Mallarmé reference and the theme of chance into the 'narrative' of the film are not without a certain element of irony, an aspect that has gone unnoticed by many critics. The physical presence of the oversized dice serves not only to create a strange sense of proportion that makes the actors appear impish, but also bestows upon the scene an absurd or burlesque quality, undermining the seriousness of the act of throwing dice to determine a sequence of events. Indeed, an element of humour is glimpsed briefly as one of the dice is raised into the air as if to strike the head of the adjacent person, the inter-title "Un coup de dés" playing on the dual significance of 'un coup' as either a throw or a blow (**Still 55**). Given Man Ray's penchant for the *double entendre*, the irony of the scene is not difficult to spot.

In *Les Mystères*, as with *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, Man Ray brings chance into play with elements of order and logic. That each set of characters roll dice to decide on what to do next introduces an element of predictability through repetition. In considering this aspect of the film, we are reminded of Man Ray's comment, referred to in chapter one, that "quand on répète une chose, ce n'est plus le hasard."[41] Therefore, the contradictory nature of chance is already introduced on the level of narrative. Furthermore, after rolling the dice, the activities of the villa's guests that make up the middle section of the film take on a gradually more organised and regular quality that fit in, as we shall see, with the geometric explorations of the building's architecture. The body is shown not to be independent of the laws of its surroundings, but rather subject to them, ultimately giving rise to a fusion between animate and inanimate, of which more will be said later. The interplay between chance and order can be detected on the level of the film's

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[41] See chapter one, p. 45.

construction. In an approach that to a large extent characterises his earlier films, Man Ray allowed the forces of chance to dictate the visual quality of *Les Mystères*. The sequence of the journey made from Paris to the south of France, in which the camera captures the passing landscape and the fortuitous patterns of light and shadow, expresses, on the one hand, the spirit of spontaneity with which it was filmed. Yet, looking at it from another perspective, this section of the film also demonstrates a sense of order and precision in the geometric regularity of both natural and man-made surroundings. These fleeting impressions thus both contrast with and prefigure the subsequent explorations of the villa in which choreographed movements and framing create complex geometrical compositions. The carefully traced path of the camera, as it slowly and meticulously records the structural details of the building, counterbalances the quickly paced and improvisational nature of the preceding section. Man Ray thus seems to offset the creative effects of chance with those of a more ordered approach, a process that forges a strong link with both *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*.

It is clear then that the role of chance in the film goes beyond straightforward references to Mallarmé's poem in the inter-titles and the presence of dice and develops a number of strategies to render chance both complex and questionable. However, although this is perhaps the most obvious link between the poem and the film, it is certainly not the only perspective from which to understand the relationship between them. Man Ray may have been greatly influenced by Mallarmé's conception of chance and his interest in contradiction and duality, factors that are reflected in the structure of *Les Mystères*, but a comparison of the two works takes us much deeper into the fabric of Man Ray's film and enables us to understand it as one of the most complex interdisciplinary works. It is therefore in the analysis of the way the film reflects certain formal tendencies of the poem that the intricate weaving of artistic influences can be found. This first of all brings us back to some of the central concerns of the earlier films, particularly *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*.

Rhythm and movement

One of the key features of *Un coup de dés* is the way it expresses rhythm and movement through the formal presentation of the text. As Virginia A. La Charité has

noted, "when upper-case and lower-case letters are mixed, the effect on the reader is one of contrastive movement: the lowercase letters tend to reflect stability, while the upper-case ones indicate dynamism or instability."[42] On some pages the text flows smoothly downwards in a diagonal movement from one corner of the page to another, whereas on others there is a jagged left-to-right movement. The use of italics enhances the sensation of rhythm by creating an impression of lightness and speed.[43] These qualities are demonstrated most effectively on pages 16 and 17 of the poem **(Fig. 22)**. The minimalist content of the left page and the sweeping downward movement that it traces from right to left and then right again contrasts with the abundance of information and lack of direction found in that on the right, thus demonstrating a concern with pace and rhythm. Here the eye of the reader is given the most freedom since there are very few organisational cues, except for the "LE HASARD" in large uppercase letters. This phrase functions as the focus-point since the eye moves directly to it by virtue of its dominating presence on the page. Around it, various words and groupings of words of different sizes and typeface produce an overriding sense of chaos and fragmentation, which thwarts any attempt at straightforward comprehension. The staccato rhythms of the top half of the page, in which the thick grouping of the text is dominated by the repetitive punctuation, "EXISTÂT-IL," COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL," SE CHIFFRÂT-IL," and "ILLUMINÂT-IL," contrasts with the lower half, which expresses a more free-flowing movement. The latter effect of rhythmic continuity and weightlessness as opposed to the earlier heavy pulsations is symbolically reflected in the words themselves: "Choit / la plume / rythmique suspens du sinistre."[44]

This dynamism and changing rhythm of *Un coup de dés* is to a large extent reflected in the tempo of *Les Mystères*. This is demonstrated most effectively during the travel sequence. The piece of music that was chosen by Man Ray to accompany this section of the film, *Samba Tembo* by Thurston Knudson, serves to highlight its

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[42] Virginia A. La Charité, *The Dynamics of Space: Mallarmé's* Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 1987), p. 40.
[43] Reynolds, "The Kinesthetics of Chance: Mallarmé's Un Coup de Dés and Avant-Garde Choreography," p. 103.
[44] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 382-3.

C'ÉTAIT
issu stellaire

CE SERAIT
pire
non
davantage ni moins
indifféremment mais autant

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL
autrement qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL
sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu
enfin
par quelque profusion répandue en rareté
SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la somme pour peu qu'une
ILLUMINÂT-IL

LE HASARD

Chaît
la plume
rythmique suspens du sinistre
s'ensevelir
aux écumes originelles
naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime
flétrie
par la neutralité identique du gouffre

Figure 22.

rhythmic qualities by providing a corresponding beat.[45] The continuous rhythm that is beat out by the music reminds one of the repetitive sounds made by a moving train, foregrounding the themes of movement and energy that are central qualities of the poem, whilst making a subtle reference to the train journey in *L'Etoile de mer*. The sequence consists of a series of short self-contained views of the surrounding landscape and, as such, each shot provides a new development, thrusting the film forward in a way that mirrors the speed and progression of the actual journey. During these moments, the feeling of being effortlessly carried forward by an invisible force (the car itself is almost completely absent from the image during the journey) is comparable to the kinetic qualities of *Un coup de dés*. Furthermore, this feeling of speed and transience, which correspond with the italics of the poem, is abruptly punctuated by the solid forms and oppressive presence of the sculpture that signals the end of the journey. Shot in a series of close-ups, the sculpture can be seen as echoing the larger typeface of the poem discussed above. Just as this section of the text is characterised by repetition, a quality that further breaks with the earlier lighter rhythms, so too do the successive shots of the slowly rotating statue in the film contrast with the rapid kinetic sensations of the previous sequence. This sequence of the journey in *Les Mystères*, which functions as the first main focal point of the film, can be seen to demonstrate the impression of chaos and fragmentation that characterises the overall structure of the poem. Each shot represents a different view, often with a changed camera position and there is often little thematic consistency from one flash of imagery and the next. Any connection that could be made exists on the level of form, in much the same way as the poem itself.

Another formal aspect of the Mallarmé text, highlighted by La Charité, relates to the poet's stay in Brittany in 1873. La Charité argues that this extends beyond the nautical references to incorporate actual physical similarities: "Resembling the serrated, jagged appearance of the coastline of Brittany, the layout of *Un Coup de dés* is one of displacement, loss of equilibrium, abrupt obstacles and an uneven rising and falling motion."[46] A similar process can be evidenced in the

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[45] Man Ray's musical indications for the film include four other pieces: Gymnopédie no. 1 written by Erik Satie and interpreted by Leopold Stokowski, José Morand's Batucada and Shu-Shu, and Swinga-Dilla Street by Fats Waller.

[46] La Charité, *The Dynamics of Space: Mallarmé's* Un coup de dés jamais n`abolira le hasard, p. 126.

visual representation of the villa in *Les Mystères* and the continual juxtaposition of vertical, horizontal and diagonal camera movements, giving rise to a sense of fragmentation and disorientation. The arrival in the film of the two travellers at the villa is signalled by a series of camera movements that alternate between vertical and horizontal, reflecting the regularity of the architectural structures of the building and the way they contrast with the irregularity of its natural surroundings. The camera first follows a jagged wall that traces a climbing diagonal trajectory until it reaches the straight vertical lines of a castle tower, where it whips horizontally past a row of trees. Another brief vertical movement is made towards the sky, which is followed by a horizontal pan along another wall, this time of the villa itself, ending on a vertically upright sculpture (discussed above). In a series of shots, the formal intricacies of the sculpture are explored, first from a distance and then gradually moving closer to the object. The subsequent sequence describes the exterior grounds of the villa, which begins with a panning shot lasting over fifty seconds. The slow horizontal movement recalls a similar pan of the sea in *Emak Bakia*, in which the camera traces the line made by the waves on the sand, bringing us back to the nautical theme of *Un coup de dés.* So, whilst the formal layout of Mallarmé's poem can be seen to have its roots in physical reality, Man Ray's use of the camera likewise follows the formal peculiarities of the villa.

This relationship between writing and filmmaking can be conceptualised in relation to Alexandre Astruc's notion, coined in 1948, of the *caméra-stylo*, which understands modern filmmaking in terms of its transformation into a language. "By language," Astruc states, "I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel."[47] Astruc's notion of the *caméra-stylo*, whereby the filmmaker 'writes' with the camera, was assimilated into what emerged in France during the late 1950s as '*la politique des auteurs*' and in America as 'the *auteur* theory', a theoretical approach to the cinema that privileged the creative individualism of the director over the collective anonymity of the studio system. What seems interesting within this approach is the way that, despite Astruc's analogy of the 'camera-pen' as an attempt to give to cinema the cultural status enjoyed by

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[47] Alexandre Astruc (1948) quoted in John Caughie (ed.), *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 9.

literature, the theory of the auteur actually focused predominantly on the separation of the seventh art from literary and theatrical influences, placing emphasis on specifically 'cinematic' modes of expression in an echo of earlier avant-garde film theory.[48] If we look closely at the correspondences between the visual characteristics of *Un coup de dés* and those of *Les Mystères*, Astruc's analogy begins to take on a wider significance. However, the nature of this relationship between the camera and the pen is complex, since it is only through an examination of the way the film appears to mirror certain strategies employed by Mallarmé that Man Ray can be seen as engaging in a kind of cinematic 'writing'.

Further observations can be made in relation to the correspondences between literary practices and the art of filmmaking. Susan McCabe, for example, has recently explored the relationship between modernist poetry and film, arguing that there is a similarity between the poetry of Gertrude Stein and the kind of visual expression found in *Emak Bakia*.[49] The main thrust of her argument centres on the notion that Stein's use of fragmentation and the juxtaposition of words can be seen as synonymous with the loose structure and the questioning of objective reality found in Man Ray's film. The correspondences that can be found between the formal concerns of *Un coup de dés* and those of *Les Mystères* demonstrate a reverse process, which sees Man Ray mirroring, cinematically, Mallarmé's unique and revolutionary poetic style. It could be argued, however, that the kinetic (and therefore cinematic) qualities of the poem lend themselves easily to such a comparison. Yet, the overriding sense of fragmentation that characterises the poem is a continually recurring aspect of the film. Although the film was commissioned partly as an architectural document, very few sections of *Les Mystères* aim to create an overall, objective view of the villa and focus instead on individual parts that stand for the whole. We are reminded of Man Ray's comment about *Emak Bakia*, in which he describes the film as a "series of fragments." Whether or not Man Ray consciously set out to reproduce in his film the structures of *Un Coup de dés* is uncertain. What is clear though is that, for the first time, his filmmaking incorporates extensive camera movement leading to an

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[48] Theorists such as Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein for instance argued for the development of a new kind of French cinema that would emphasise medium-specificity and lead to the emancipation of the cinema from its subservience to the other arts.

[49] Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 65.

exploration of space, an important aspect of Mallarmé's poem and the theme to which this chapter shall now turn.

Spatial relations

The concentration on space effectuates an overlapping relationship between the arts of film, poetry and architecture. It is within the realms of spatial exploration that *Un Coup de dés* and *Les Mystères* can be understood as expressing similar concerns, even if these concerns are related specifically to the media in which they are created. If Man Ray's film demonstrates an interest in cinematic space, Mallarmé's focuses attention on textual space and the visual layout of the poem. *Un Coup de dés* is characterised largely by the arrangement of text on the page and the way different word groupings dictate the freely moving gaze of the reader. This is not restricted to an awareness of the page itself as an overall physical spatial entity but is broken down to include the smaller units of space between the words and groupings of words. When the poem was first published in the magazine, *Cosmopolis* in 1897, Mallarmé provided a preface, in which he attempted to orientate the reader, stating: "Les "blancs" en effet, assument l'importance, frappent d'abord."[50] His comment is therefore an instruction to the public to 'read' the spaces as an integral part of the text. La Charité has argued that space in fact constitutes the poem's fundamental driving force:

> Because space is the primary element of the text, it is by, in, with, and through space that the reader must pursue relationships and seek to establish points of contact which confer meaning upon the units of the text. Space is the authorial controlling factor which directs the reader and orders the accumulation of data which may be read and interpreted … To read *Un Coup de dés* demands a reading of the space which supplies its order and confers on the text its ultimate form.[51]

Charité's account is valuable in the sense that it highlights a strong formal characteristic of the poem that in many ways relates to Man Ray's own visual concerns in both photography and film. Mallarmé's notion of space assuming a key role in the process of reading can be understood in terms of Man Ray's assertion,

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[50] Mallarmé, *OC*, p. 391.
[51] La Charité, *The Dynamics of Space: Mallarmé's* Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard, p. 44.

discussed in Chapter two, that the shadow cast by a person or object is as important as its physical referent. The shadow is basically a projection *into* space and involves an awareness of one thing in relation to its opposite. Thus, whilst Mallarmé seems to argue that the configurations into which words can be arranged are as infinite as the space that surrounds them, so too does Man Ray seem to approach a similar hypothesis in relation to objects and the physical space they inhabit. The infinite number of visual configurations provided by the raw material of external reality certainly seems to be a key feature of *Emak Bakia*. But precisely how can Mallarmé's concentration on space be related to the content of *Les Mystères* and the use of architecture as its subject matter?

Space and the cinema

In order to understand Man Ray's interest in space as a creative element, it is useful first of all to consider the different perspectives from which space can be perceived and conceptualised. Fundamentally ambiguous and virtually impossible to grasp theoretically, space evades straightforward categorisation. However, I would like to hinge this discussion on the definition provided by La Charité in relation to Mallarmé's poem. "Space," she states, "is the abstract which cannot be explained, the pure which cannot be experienced, the authentic which cannot be derived: it is formless, not enclosed … sterile, unlimited, original and complete within itself … Space has no direction; it is anti-linear and open or free." [52] The combination of so many unknowns provides the perfect context for an artist such as Man Ray, whose work constantly leans towards ambiguity, mystery and the elusive. The contradictory nature of space (it forms the basis of concrete reality, yet it is, at the same time, a purely abstract phenomenon) is one of the central concerns of Man Ray's work. Chapter two discusses the way Man Ray's photographic work was carried out principally in a studio setting, allowing him to create different visual effects through the manipulation of light. Yet, the manipulation of light also assumes a manipulation of space, since light can only be perceived *through* space. Within the realms of the cinema, *Emak Bakia* already demonstrates to a large extent his growing interest in the creation of an undefined space. In the distortions he created through light and

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[52] Ibid, p. 13.

movement, the object not only occupies the space but morphs into it, taking on its formless and infinite features. Form and ground can no longer be separated and become one single phenomenon. The abstract nature of space is illustrated in the opening shot of car headlights in *Les Mystères* (**Still 46**). Man Ray uses the abstract quality of the white lights against a black background and the gradual expansion of what initially appear as two circular forms to describe depth and distance. Drawing on earlier experiments with the filming of artificial lights at night, this introductory shot perfectly illustrates the representational/non-representational dichotomy through the exploration of screen space. Seen as simple white forms slowly growing in size, the shot highlights the flatness and surface of the screen by privileging what appears to be a two-dimensional image. We are reminded of the circular forms of *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, not only in the sequences of rayographs but also in the sections where artificial light is used to create abstract effects (**Stills 6 & 15**). As the car reaches its closest point to the camera, the representational properties become more clearly evident, switching attention from the dimensions of the flat screen to an awareness of depth and the space within the frame.

A similar process can be detected in other sections of the film, demonstrating the way in which depth and perspective give rise to abstract geometric compositions. On a number of occasions during the travelling sequence, for example, the camera points straight ahead towards the space that the car traverses. In one shot, whilst the car drives along a country lane, the receding vertical line of the road, stretching out in front of the viewer, gives rise to a triangular form reaching from the bottom to the middle of the frame. The composition is mirrored in the top half of the shot, with the road and sky creating tonal inversion again reminiscent of the formal relationships found in *Le Retour à la raison*. The shot of the bridge provides a more complex example of these geometric arrangements, bringing into play the additional effects of shadow. A number of visual elements can be seen at work here that will become greater concerns later on in the film. The first of these is the very clear emphasis on line and the juxtaposition between the horizontal and the vertical, elements that also feature strongly in the typographical layout of Mallarmé's poem discussed earlier in this chapter. The other is the concrete framing of space, making it tangible phenomena. This framing not only allows the visual perception of a discrete unit of

space but also allows it to be entered or passed through. The arches of the bridge through which the car drives anticipate the arched passages of the villa and the repeated square forms cut out of the wall that surrounds it (**Still 48**). *Les Mystères* can thus be seen in terms of an attempt to comprehend space through the creation of geometric compositions and framings, whilst at the same time emphasising the abstract quality of these essentially formally dictated relations.

Architectural space

Les Mystères represents a fusion of architectural and cinematic space since Man Ray interacts with Mallet-Stevens' design of the villa in order to capture the abstraction contained within it. If we look again at Moussinac's statement quoted earlier, the "mathematic relations between the images" that he singles out as one of the most interesting aspects of Man Ray's films are related to a form of cinematic architecture. This seemingly unconscious connection between the main concerns of *Les Mystères* – that is, formal patterns derived from the architecture of the villa – provides us with a starting point from which to understand the visual shape of the film. Both film and architecture are defined through their relationship to space, the framing of the camera lens reflecting the framing that is created by architectural structures of walls, windows and doors. Karl Sierek, in a discussion of architecture and film, highlights the very specific nature of space in the cinema, stating

> The cinematic space is anything but closed. With openings here and there it is intersected by vectors; it points outwards instead. Every cut, every movement of the camera questions that notion of completeness, wholeness and unity, which we would also like to attribute to our own bodies. They reveal what was previously invisible, but only for an instant, followed closely by the next act in this game between inside and outside, presence and absence.[53]

The dichotomous relationships to which Sierek refers are crucial to Man Ray's film in relation to its architectural content, specifically in the interplay between internal and external spaces. Through the nature of the filming and the organisation of sequences, particular attention is given to the way in which the modernist architecture of Mallet-Stevens brings about a conflation of internal and external

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[53] Karl Sierek, "Architecture and film in the work of Corbusier, Mies, Mallet." A lecture delivered at the frije Universiteit Amsterdam, 27 April 2001.

space. Shortly after the arrival of the travellers at the villa, the camera embarks on an exploration of the garden and grounds that surround the main building. An initial 180° pan allows both the villa and the landscape in the distance to occupy the shot, whilst describing a number of oppositions: vertical/horizontal, light/shadow, nature/civilisation. Of crucial importance, however, is the way in which the shot both begins and ends on the framing of space (**Still 52**). The walls that surround the villa are constructed as a series of windows that look out on the surrounding area. External space therefore gives rise to a sense of internal space, a feature to which the uninterrupted camera movement draws attention.

In order to further draw attention to the way the villa evokes a dialogue between internal and external space, Man Ray executes a smooth transition from the grounds outside to the rooms inside. Shooting from behind a window, the camera focuses on a suspended sculpture in the form of a star, slowly moving upwards to bring the object into the frame. Aside from this practical function, the star also acts as an inter-textual motif, referring to the suspended objects of *Le Retour à la raison* and the central metaphor in *L'Etoile de mer*. The viewer is given a linguistic clue to this connection in the inter-title "Etoile de jour." The use of the star in bringing together interior and exterior space highlights the function of the window as facilitating a crossover point between the two domains. The star is important in this relationship since it is something that is seen *through* the window, demanding that the space be traversed, therefore rendering it physical. In the same way as Mallarmé's "blancs," space in Man Ray's film therefore becomes something to be perceived, negotiated and understood not simply as that which exists between things but as an element in its own right. The backwards movement of the camera in this shot also contributes to an awareness of depth by creating layers of visual information – the space of the room, the space outside the window and that which exists in between it, i.e. the window itself.

The next image is an expansion of this idea, again creating a juxtaposition of internal and external space and further emphasising the importance of the frame. The shot again begins on a vertical upwards movement of the camera, revealing another window from the inside with the exterior grounds of the villa clearly visible through it. The horizontal and vertical divisions of the window, creating a very simple

geometric composition, dominate the foreground. To this arrangement are added the horizontal lines of the shutters just visible to the centre-right of the frame. In the middle ground can be seen the horizontal lines of steps leading up to a sculpture. The upward movement of the steps leads our attention to the vertical line of the sculpture, creating an overriding sense of formal harmony. As the camera moves upwards along the window, the individual rectangular planes provide a frame for the sculpture, which slides from one adjacent space to another (**Still 53**) The composition is now one of a frame-within-a-frame-within-a-frame! As the camera reaches the top of the window the glass in the final pane slightly distorts the image and provides a faint echo of the distortions of objects and light reflections found in *Emak Bakia*, which were themselves created with glass prisms and mirrors. This allusion is not without significance since, as I have noted in the previous chapter, glass appears in different forms throughout Man Ray's films and provides an interesting perspective when tracing links between them. Although there is clearly an attraction to glass as a substance with immense aesthetic possibilities, windows and doors also appear to a large extent in *L'Etoile de mer* and *Les Mystères* as framing devices. Interestingly, this also draws attention to the act of looking, which plays an important role in the way the images are presented, i.e., from the perspective of the two travellers.

Camera mobility continues into the next section, only here the sense of suspension that characterises the previous two shots is replaced by the impression of forward movement, in some ways mirroring the car journey at the beginning of the film. The camera, placed at ground level and mounted on a trolley of some sort, fluidly moves through an unknown part of the villa, inviting an awareness of space by physically traversing it. Again, Man Ray uses the walls on either side to create a frame-within-a-frame structure and to emphasise depth. The viewer is again presented with a sense of abstraction, since it is only in coming closer to the objects and in their shift from the background to the foreground of the frame that we are able to identify them as the lower section of a table and chairs. Thus the actual movement through space is also a metaphor for the transition from abstraction to figuration created by it. Through camera positioning and the arrangement of the furniture, our attention is drawn to the abstract geometric qualities of the shot, which simultaneously express receding depth and three-dimensionality and the basic

patterns of lines on a flat plane. The household furniture is reabsorbed by its abstract qualities and attention is focused not on its utilitarian function but on its formal composition and organisation of space. This dual approach to cinematic space and the simultaneous presence of abstraction and figuration within the same image mirrors the opening image discussed above in which identical concerns are expressed.

One of the most interesting sections of the film occurs at the end of the above sequence. It is signalled by an inter-title, "Les secrets de la peinture," a joke that plays with audience expectations and humorously comments on the hidden content of the canvases of which only the backs will be shown. The shot begins with an image of a metal rack that fills the screen and divides it into tiny squares. Behind this can be seen the back of a painting, the wooden frame providing further divisions. The rack moves to the right revealing a similar image behind it, this time with a different arrangement of picture frames of various sizes. The action is repeated twelve times, each movement giving rise to the perception of space behind it, until the back of the room is finally revealed. It is here that the formal intricacies of the shot become evident, establishing compositional concerns that are increasingly more pronounced in later sections of the film. The handles of the racks are visible to the right of the frame and recede from the foreground to the background, clearly emphasising the spatial depth (**Still 54**). A mirror at the back of the room further contributes to this process by incorporating the space that exists behind the camera itself. It is positioned so that a line where the wall meets the floor divides it in two. The horizontal is again juxtaposed with the vertical in a geometric rendering of screen space. A number of other observations can be made about this particular shot. First of all it clearly represents Man Ray's interest in repetition and echoes other repetitive actions in the film, such as the slow dissolves in the opening sequence and the rolling of dice by each set of characters. As I will discuss below, this concentration on repetition contributes to a sense of visual rhythm that characterises *Les Mystères* and forges an important link with *Emak Bakia*, in which repetition also plays a key role. Another point relates to a more direct relationship with *Un Coup de dés*. A number of critics have highlighted a focus on 'le nombre' in Mallarmé's poem, some even arguing that it displays an underlying mathematical structure. Roger Pearson has

observed that, "it becomes impossible not to acknowledge, in this poem about a hypothetical throw of at least two dice, that the 'profond calcul' governing the text is based on the number twelve."[54] The total number of racks in this sequence is also twelve, attesting either to pure coincidence or to the presence in *Les Mystères* of more correspondences with Mallarmé than has been previously acknowledged. My attempts in previous chapters to underline strong formal patterns and structures in Man Ray's films should provide a context into which the latter opinion can be easily assimilated.

After this documentary-like introduction, the focus of the film changes slightly to involve the activities of the guests. However, rather than moving into narrative terrain as one would expect from such a switch of emphasis, the following sequences attempt to incorporate the body into the exploration of space that has been established up to this point. The film thus turns into a kind of choreographed performance in which bodily movements interact with the surrounding space by reacting and drawing attention to its physical attributes. Crucially, this goes beyond the simple everyday notion of bodies 'occupying' a particular space, with the surroundings acting as a backdrop, an ultimately secondary element, and moves towards an examination of the way the human body can enter into a dialogue with that space. The activities that follow are thus to a large extent insignificant beyond the formal relationships they develop and the manner in which they contribute to the perception of space.

Space and the body

Recent comparisons of Mallarmé's poem with certain modernist and avant-garde forms of art have opened up the spectrum of references and have allowed its revolutionary qualities to be understood from a variety of new perspectives. In particular, the examination made by Dee Reynolds of Mallarmé's influence on the choreographer Merce Cunningham represents one of the most interesting developments in this field. Reynolds highlights the kinetic qualities of Mallarmé's writing, already referred to in the previous section, in order to strengthen the relationship between poetry and dance. The reference to choreography is vital to the

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[54] Roger Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1996), p. 247

present discussion since *Les Mystères*, by virtue of its relationship with the poem, can be seen as making one of the earliest connections between *Un coup de dé*s and the art of dance. The choreographed movements of the actors in the film are brought into play with the modernist architecture of the villa, which itself functions as a stage, both dictating and complementing the synchronised actions of the bodies. The movements carried out by the main characters in the film are virtually devoid of narrative significance and contribute principally to a stylised representation of the way in which the body occupies a modernist space. From this perspective, *Les Mystères* appears to approach the concerns explored through modern dance, where certain movements are understood specifically in the context of the difficult relationship between the human body and its surroundings.

Human presence is first seen in a 'hidden corner' of the villa, where four bodies lie spread across the floor. A square of light that comes through a window and appears to frame their movements, along with lines of shadow on the floor, gives the first indications of an interplay of geometric elements. The guests stand up, drop their robes and run out of the frame, the camera lingering on the image of the abandoned dice and clothing. There is an overriding awareness here of presence through absence, a theme that seems to thread its way through Man Ray's films. This is already suggested in the earlier sequences in which the travellers, through whose eyes we are supposedly viewing the villa and whose presence is explicitly referred to, remain absent from the frame, except for during the short section that precedes their journey. The text that follows the shot further consolidates this idea: "Existe-t-il des fantômes d'action? … des fantômes de nos actions passées? Les minutes vécues ne laissent-elles pas des traces concrètes dans l'air et sur la terre?" By using this inter-title, Man Ray seems to suggest the important relationship between the body and the space through which it passes, arguing for a more heightened awareness of the paradoxical nature of space in its ability to express both presence and absence, present and past.

One of the most the most significant observations to be made about Man Ray's treatment of the body is precisely the way it points towards a collective, or universal, rather than individual form of expression. Virtually every aspect of the representation of people in the film points towards the process of de-personalisation.

For the most part, the actions carried out by the 'inhabitants' of the castle are choreographed and synchronised in such a way that their presence becomes increasingly defined by a sense of uniformity. This is emphasised by the fact that they wear identical clothing in every section of the film. Whilst in conventional narrative cinema the clothes of a character correspond in varying extents to his or her psychological traits, the costume in *Les Mystères* contributes exclusively to the emphasis on formal, geometric relationships. The horizontal stripes on the t-shirts worn by Noailles and his guests reflect and are brought into play with the geometric structures of the villa, creating complex visual compositions.

In one shot that takes place in the gymnasium we are presented with a wall covered with a wooden ladder. The four characters run into the frame from behind the camera and arrange themselves in various positions on the ladder. The effect is that the patterns of the characters' t-shirts correspond exactly with the lines of the ladder formation (**Still 57**). Our interest is focused clearly on this formal arrangement and the movements of the 'characters' are significant only in the way they contribute to the bringing together of the human form with the characteristics of the building. In a similar sequence, another empty shot of a shadow-covered floor is gradually filled as the characters roll into position, one against the other, their directions alternating in a head to toe arrangement. Once all four characters are in position, a geometric harmony is revealed through the symmetry of the black and white alternations created by their clothes (**Still 58**). Both this and the previously mentioned shot end with the sudden disappearance of the bodies, leaving the original geometrically defined 'empty' space. The body is characterised by a constant state of flux and impermanence, compared with the stability and longevity of its surroundings. Later in the film these qualities are reversed when the body takes on the inanimate characteristics of a statue. The first illustration of this occurs during the sequence of activities on the terrace, the point at which the movements become more and more choreographed and the focus more formally determined. A panning shot shows the four characters standing on stools against the outer wall of the swimming pool. Their alignment in relation to the building and the identical pose adopted by each – arms thrust above the head – makes them instantly appear de-humanised and transformed into the surrounding décor. The second example appears at the very end of the film

when the second set of travellers find themselves within the grounds of the villa and decide (with the help of the dice) to stay, their decision being symbolised in the literal freezing of their movement. The inversion of the image into negative strengthens the effect by making their bodies appear white so that they resemble the statue next to which they are placed (**Still 60**). This transferrence of formal qualities is a strong feature of *Le Retour à la raison*, the film to which the positive-negative inversion outwardly refers.

The main section of this part of the film takes place in the swimming pool. Natural light pours in from the large windows situated along the side of the pool, creating a bright, open space. For the majority of the sequence, shooting is done from a high position looking down onto the water. This creates the best perspective of the building and allows movements to be captured in a general manner that does not distract attention away from the spatial context. At the top of the frame is a mirror, which, in the same way as the earlier shot, creates another dimension of screen space that is not within the camera's field of vision. As the guests swim, dive and climb up ropes suspended above the pool, the camera executes a series of corresponding vertical and horizontal movements, constantly allying their activities with the space in which it is carried out. At times, certain elements seem to occupy the shot for reasons of compositional tension, the mirror for instance, and a swing made out of rope that moves in and out of the frame. One of the women (Marie-Laure de Noailles) performs a series of underwater tricks, such as juggling, brushing hair, skipping and weightlifting. Beyond their role as mere personal performances, designed to amuse and entertain the private audience to which the film would be shown, these individual actions play with spatial expectations, since the novelty arises precisely from the reversal of usual relations. The sea-sky reversal of *Emak Bakia* is once again evoked and a context is created for the increasing use of camera rotations. These suggestions of underwater space, signalled by the inter-title "Eve sous-marine" draw attention to Man Ray's interest in this cinematically inaccessible realm. Again in *Emak Bakia*, an attempt at simulating underwater filming can be seen in the multiple exposures of swimming goldfish, shot in close-up so that the water fills the screen and creates a sense of expansive space (**Still 23**). In *Les*

Mystères, the reflections of water on the walls surrounding the swimming pool can be read from a similar perspective.

The aquatic section is followed by a number of sequences in which the guests become more actively involved with the architectural structures of the villa in creating complex geometrical compositions. A static shot (**Still 56**) shows them emerging out of the water and walking along the edge of the pool. The camera is positioned directly in front of them on the poolside so that they walk from background to foreground, the path receding to the back wall. As with previous shots, Man Ray positions the camera in order to most effectively create a sense of space and depth, the large windows on the right-hand side providing the vertical reference points. Everything in the frame seems to highlight the juxtaposition of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines and geometrically aligned shapes. The windows, the floor of the poolside and the radiator in the background all stress vertical harmony, whilst the sunlight that streams into the room creates a diagonal tension whilst simultaneously drawing the eye to the various square forms in the other half of the frame. The bodies disappear one-by-one past the camera and out of the shot.

In another section, the group sit cross-legged in the gymnasium. They are positioned in such a way that they are facing each other, with the two figures furthest away from the camera being 'framed' on either side by the other two. In the background the wooden climbing frame is visible and again provides the very definite geometric lines with which the rest of the shot comes into play. A gauze or mesh is placed over the camera lens and creates contrasting vertical lines in the foreground. Kinetic elements are added to the formal composition: the group throw a ball to each other, which has the dual effect of establishing both a horizontal line and indicating depth in the centre. Throughout the duration of this shot, the mesh moves from side to side, constantly bringing the eye to the surface of the screen. This shot is perhaps the most complex of the film since it is the one that involves the most spatial and geometric relations. In order to go beyond simply describing space through the mimetic qualities of the cinema, Man Ray creates layers of geometrically defined images in order to render perception more complex, dividing the space into different planes, which interact with each other to create both harmony and contrast. The eye

is forced to move back and forth between the three points of interest: the wooden frame in the background, the mesh in the foreground and the action that takes place in the middle ground.

This is taken further in the next shot, which rearranges the elements to make the relationship even more disorientating. The position of the camera is moved so that the outer windows of the swimming pool are visible to the left of the frame. This allows a juxtaposition of both interior and exterior and increases the amount of visual detail within the shot (**Still 59**). The camera itself is also tilted slightly to the right so that our perspective on the scene is somewhat confused, since what were previously horizontal and vertical lines now become diagonals, clashing with the clean and straight angles of the frame. An extra person is added to the group and the formal arrangement of their bodies is more complexly composed. Two figures in the foreground take up acrobatic stances arching their bodies backwards with feet and hands on the ground. Behind them, the remaining three rotate a giant ball in the air above them.

(In) animate transformations

The incorporation of the human form into Man Ray's explorations of space and composition draws attention to one of the central themes of his work: the exchange of qualities between animate and inanimate phenomena. This is explored to a great extent throughout his films, capitalising on the possibilities of the medium to reverse the laws of everyday reality whilst maintaining the semblance of mimesis through photographic realism. *Emak Bakia* outwardly exploits this quality by employing a range of technical processes, such as animation, montage editing and double exposure, whilst *L'Etoile de mer* more subtly explores cinema's potential for the development of metaphoric transference between images on the level of thematic content. *Les Mystères*, as the previous section demonstrates, takes these investigations further by bringing the body into a more complex relationship with its surroundings, giving rise to a mysterious interchange where the body is de-personalised and inanimate phenomena take on expressive qualities. This interchange can be related to a self-reflexive awareness of the mechnical basis of the cinema and

its ability to transcend the physical laws of reality, bringing us back, once again, to the Dada-related concerns of Man Ray's earlier films.

As with *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, the human form is exploited for its plastic qualities and not for any emotional expressiveness. It is from this perspective that *Les Mystères* effectively demonstrates the extent of Man Ray's disinterest in the dramatic possibilities of film, since, although there is the vague suggestion of a narrative, the characters are never really explored within this vein, their psychological drives being reduced to simple, almost mechanical, either/or decisions that they themselves do not make but which are made for them by a throw of dice. The human condition is thus represented as a series of choices that give rise to particular situations. Despite the recurrence of this existentialist perspective, it is clearly not the focus of the film, since Man Ray's interests are directed towards the purely cinematic representation of the body. The dive, executed by Noailles, that appears in reverse gives the impression of a highly mechanical movement that is imbued with a self-conscious reference to technique. A similar effect is repeated later in the film when one of the guests (possibly Noailles again), runs towards the camera and then, as the action reverses, appears to run backwards from where he came. This relationship between film as machine and body as machine can also be seen in the famous washerwoman sequence of *Ballet Mécanique*, where the repetition of a single movement through editing creates an analogy with the previous sequences of machine parts in motion. The way in which the mechanical processes of cinema become the subject matter of the film represents one of the major challenges to Surrealism's simulacrum of reality. By drawing attention to the *difference* between reality and its cinematic representation, Man Ray bypasses the Surrealist desire to use the illusionist nature of the cinema and its capacity for *dépaysement* to represent the workings of the unconscious mind and to produce certain psychological shocks in the spectator. These sections of *Les Mystères* rather lead to a re-questioning of the relationship between avant-garde cinema and early forms of pre-narrative or "primitive" cinema, already discussed in chapter one.[55] The use of reverse motion in

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[55] The term "primitive" cinema is developed and discussed by Kristin Thompson in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985). See also Tom Gunning, ""Primitive Cinema" A Frame-up? or The Trick's on Us." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 28 no. 2, Winter, 1989, pp. 3-12 .

Les Mystères very closely resembles one of the earliest illustrations of the technique in Auguste Lumière's *Démolition d'un mur* (1895), in which a wall is knocked down and then subsequently rebuilds itself. This reference to the element of spectacle (and, of course, humour) of early cinema demonstrates a kind of homage to and nostalgia for a non-codified, non-illusionist form of filmmaking, where a fascination with technique was still very dominant. Furthermore, the re-appropriation of these early concerns in the avant-garde cinema of the 1920s reveals a desire to overcome the fixed relationship between the body and its surroundings that is one of the common features of Dada. The link between Dada-related cinema – the destruction of illusion and the drawing attention to the technical and thus artificial nature of the medium – and early pre-narrative cinema has been repeatedly highlighted and provides an interesting perspective on the movement's conflation of positive and negative tendencies.[56] This relationship thus further highlights the difficult positioning of *Les Mystères* between the discourses of Dada and Surrealism.

This can be seen in other sections of the film, where the depersonalised representation of the human body and its incorporation into the modernist architecture of the villa gives way to a contrasting process in which objects are brought to life and where our ordinary perception of the world is subtly altered, allowing the expression not necessarily of what *is* but of what *could be*. The animation of inert objects is present from the very beginning of the film, in which wooden hands roll a pair of dice. The same hands appear at the end, functioning as a kind of framing device and a reiteration of one of the main themes of the film. The paradoxical nature of hands made of wood – fusing the animate with the inanimate – draws attention to the idea of contradiction and duality that runs throughout Man Ray's films. The themes of immobilisation and the transformation of humans into statues or sculptures referred to above contrast with the visual presentation of the Lipschitz's statue at the beginning of the film. Here the focus is that of making an inert object appear mobile, which, as I have stated earlier, relates directly to the title of the work itself (*J'aime le mouvement qui déplace les formes*) and the obvious reference to the creative possibilities of movement. The object is filmed is such a way as to give the impression that the sculpture is rotating in front of the camera,

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[56] See, for instance, Elza Adamowicz, "Bodies Cut And Dissolved: Dada and Surrealist Film." In: *Gender and French Film*, ed. J. Williams and A. Hughes (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p. 21-22.

breathing life into otherwise lifeless entity. In his description of the film, Man Ray refers to this interchange of qualities, evoking the same kind of impression as that of the "epileptic dance" of the pins and the "lone," "desperate" thumbtack" in *Le Retour à la raison*:[57] "Inanimate objects, hoops, dumbbells and medicine balls have a little spree of their own rolling back and forth on the terrace."[58] The first signs of this bringing to life of inanimate objects are found in the exploration of the interiors of the castle. An inter-title, "An intruder" has the effect not only of suggesting human presence but also of highlighting a conventional narrative device – the disruption of normality that will incite a series of actions and create narrative flow. When the subsequent shot shows a cover rolling itself back to reveal a sink, the surprise that is created is a dual one: the viewer's narrative expectations are subverted but also the lack of human presence underlines the animate characteristics of the sink. A similar process occurs moments later when the search becomes more pronounced. The third declaration of "personne" is followed by a shot of a statue of two African figures staring back at the camera. This humorous moment of self-reflexivity echoes the shots of women's faces in *Emak Bakia*, in which the viewer's gaze is returned and the process of looking becomes a central issue in the destruction of cinematic illusion. That Man Ray overtly restricts the 'look' in other sections of the film by placing stockings over the actors' faces makes this personification of the inanimate figures all the more significant.

The transformation of the inherent properties of natural phenomena is a central characteristic of Man Ray's work and is particularly pronounced in his photography. The photographic medium, with its intrinsic insistence on reality and representation is equipped with the very tools with which to convincingly reshape this reality and reorganise our vision of the world. As Rosalind Krauss has observed, one of the characteristics of Man Ray's photography is the de-familiarisation of the human body, "redrafting the map of what we would have thought the most familiar of terrains."[59] This process relates equally to the treatment of objects. Throughout his career Man Ray was interested in altering the perception of objects, particularly those

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[57] Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, p. 212.
[58] Ibid, p. 228-9.
[59] Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delecti." In: *Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, eds. Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York: Abbeville Press: 1985), p. 60.

that have the most banal or defined everyday functions. This is seen clearly in the rayographs with which he worked extensively during the 1920's. A comment by Jean Sanchet in relation to these images allows us to contextualise the animate/inanimate exchange in *Les Mystères*. He states: "Les rayographies sont des *nus d'objets*,"[60] evoking an interchange of qualities, a kind of anthropomorphising of objects that heavily occupies certain sections of the film. These observations establish a clear framework for understanding *Les Mystères* as a crucial element in Man Ray's oeuvre since the film seems to express similar concerns despite the restraints of the commission. We can see it clearly within the context of Man Ray's comment that his films were, as much as anything, an attempt to put into motion the effects he created in photography.

The above discussion attempts to demonstrate that, although *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* is often overlooked in the context of Man Ray's film work, it offers a number of interesting perspectives from which to view his development as a filmmaker. One of the most important aspects of the film is the way it reflects certain formal concerns of the earlier works, attesting to its crucial position *within* and not, as some critics have approached it, on the margins, of his cinematic oeuvre. Although the circumstances that surrounded the making of the film initially suggested that it would stand apart from the rest of Man Ray's films, it nonetheless found a certain success as an avant-garde work due to the spirit of innovation and experimentation with which it was approached. If, as Inez Hedges notes, *Les Mystères* returns to the concerns with abstraction that characterise Man Ray's first film *Le Retour à la raison* to which I have referred briefly in this chapter, it also reflects structural patterns found in *L'Etoile de mer*.[61] Both films make use of a sort of prologue and epilogue that serves to 'frame' the content. In *L'Etoile de mer* this is the opening and closing door and the reappearance of the characters in the same locale at the end as in the beginning. The framing in *Les Mystères* is provided by the image of the wooden hands and another mirrored action: whilst the characters at the beginning of the film decide to leave, those at the end decide to stay. This shared

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[60] Jean Sanchet, "Rayographies," in Sarane Alexandrian, *Man Ray* (Paris: Editions Fillipachi, 1973), p. 26.
[61] Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer*," p. 107.

characteristic of the framing device is further emphasised by Man Ray's instructions for the musical accompaniment, since both films begin and end with the same piece of music, *C'est lui* by Josephine Baker in *L'Etoile de mer* and Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie* in *Les Mystères*.[62] That *Le Retour à la raison* is often considered as his most improvised work, whilst *L'Etoile de mer*, with its basis in the scenario written by Desnos, is clearly the one that displays the most pre-planning and organisation of scenes, demonstrates the extent to which *Les Mystères* brings together elements from different stages in his career.

The most important conclusions, however, emerge from an assessment of the way Man Ray weaves the expressive qualities of poetry and architecture into the fabric of the film. The inspiration drawn from Mallarmé leads to another example of the way the text works alongside the images to create a poetic interplay of ideas. As in *L'Etoile de mer*, the inter-titles do not simply provide a commentary on the images but rather take on their own expressive significance. Word and image thus interact to provide different levels of meaning. This chapter has drawn attention to the film's concentration on space. Man Ray's exploration of the cinematic space and the way it impacts on, and is affected by, architectural space, mirrors the exploration of space in Mallarmé's poem, *Un coup de dés*. The similarity between the two works, I have argued, rests on the way both artists attempt to build an awareness of space by focusing on the basic formal qualities of their media. The architectural subject of *Les Mystères* provides Man Ray with a solid formal basis from which to carry out his examination of actual space and its cinematic representation. The modernist backdrop also allows for the development of themes such as the relationship between body and its surroundings and the notion of an overlapping past and present. Although some of these themes can be related to the concerns of the Surrealists, I have tried to demonstrate the way Man Ray's approach leans towards predominantly aesthetic, rather than psychological, explorations.

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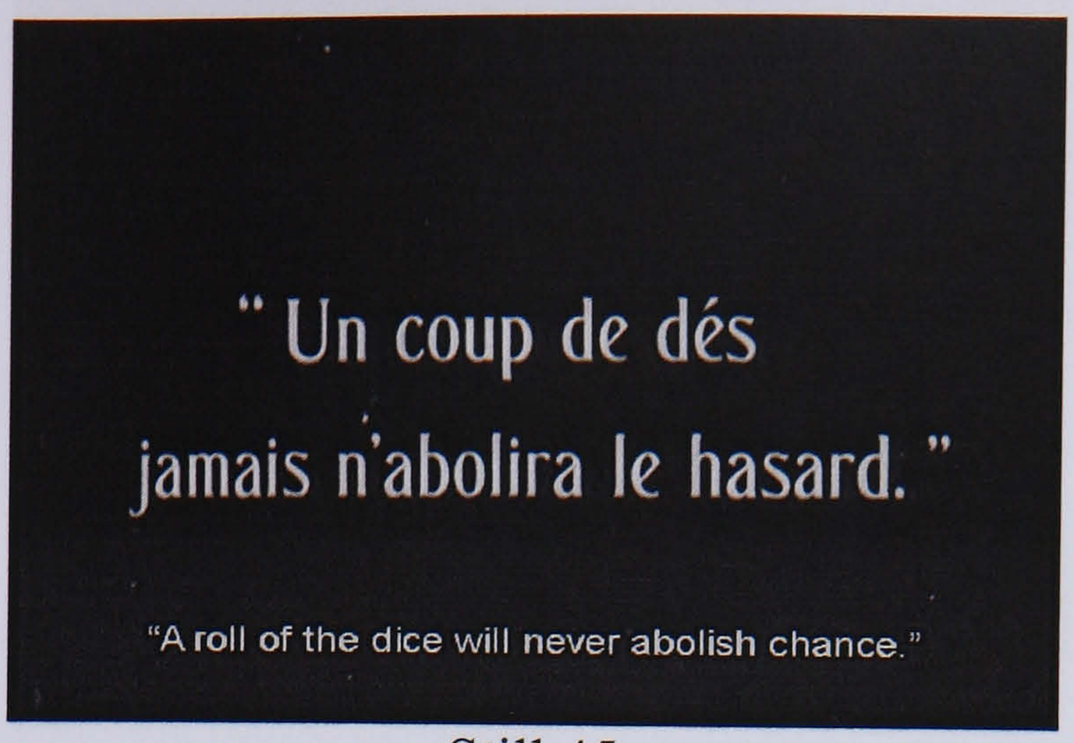
[62] Man Ray's instructions for the musical accompaniment to *L'Etoile de mer* actually list *Sigonomi sou zito* as the final piece, yet the additional comment "If film *Star of the Sea* ends before record E, replay record A" suggests the cyclical structure that is already developed within the film. Bouhours and De Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies*, p. 60.



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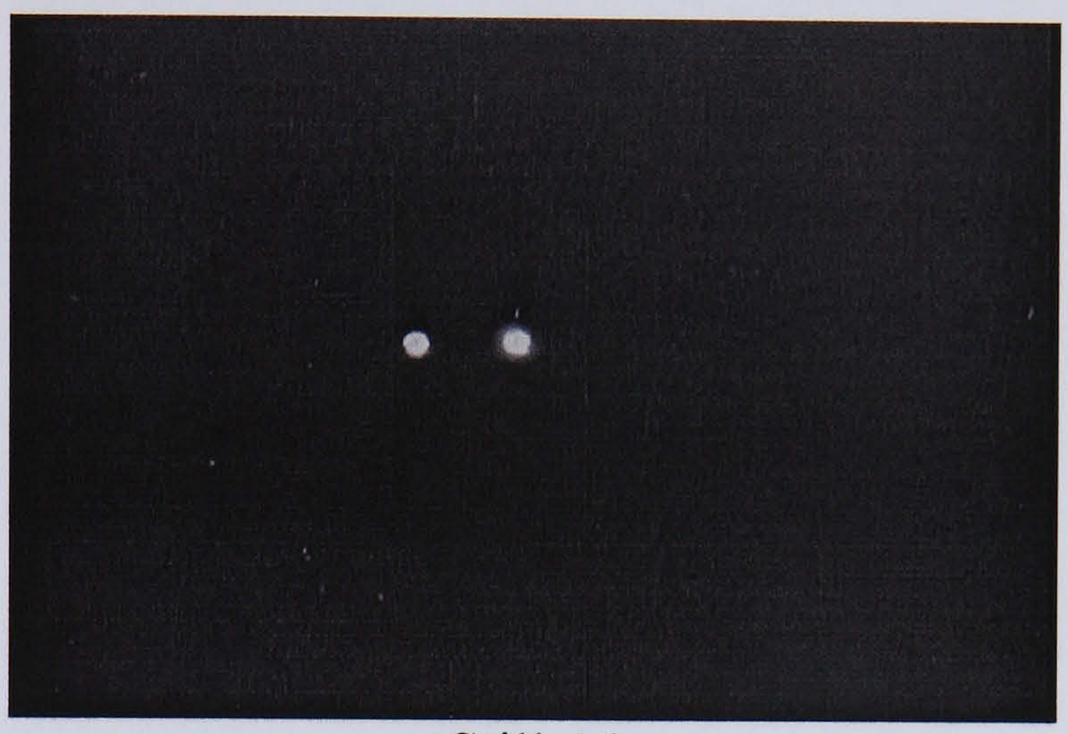

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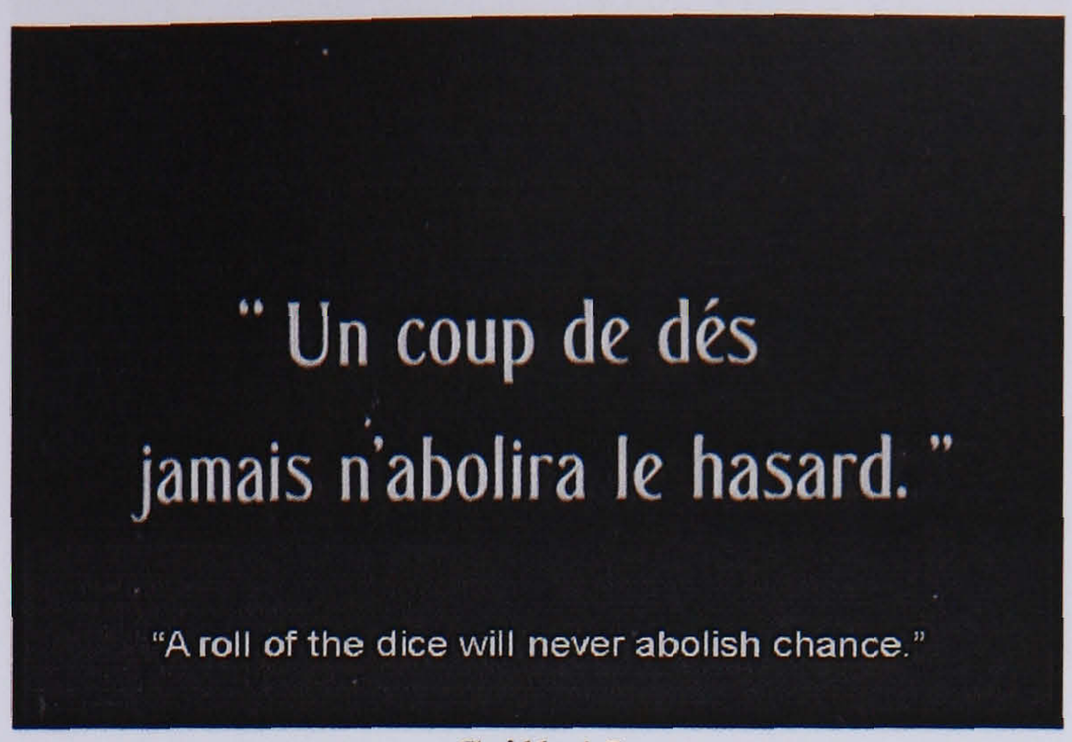

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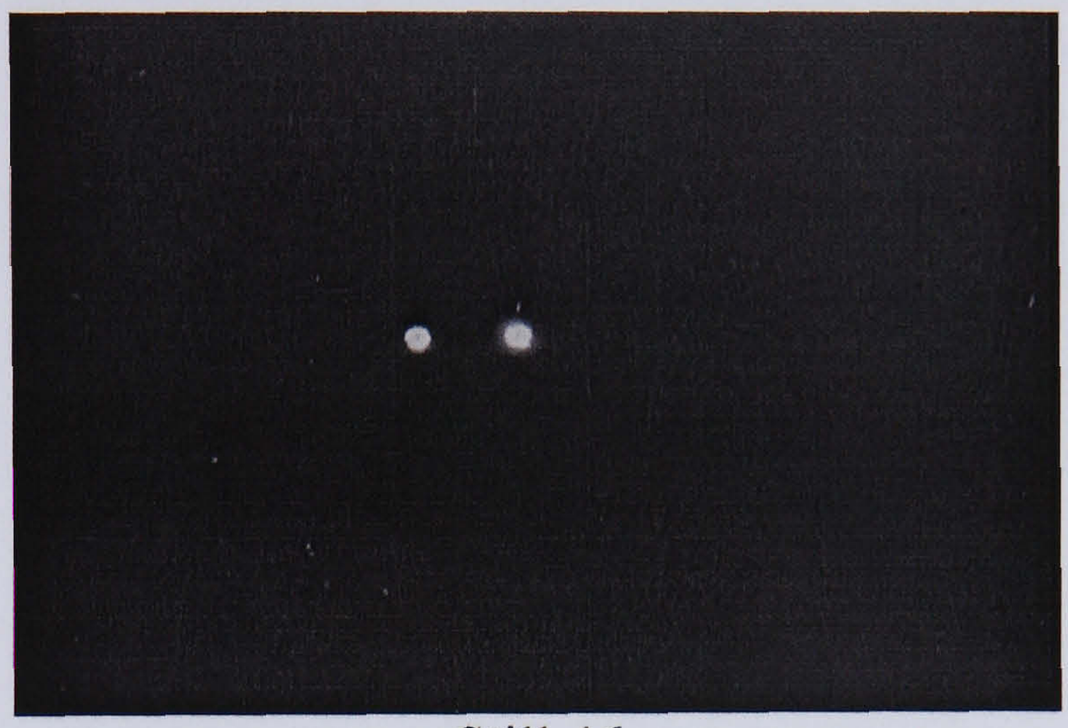

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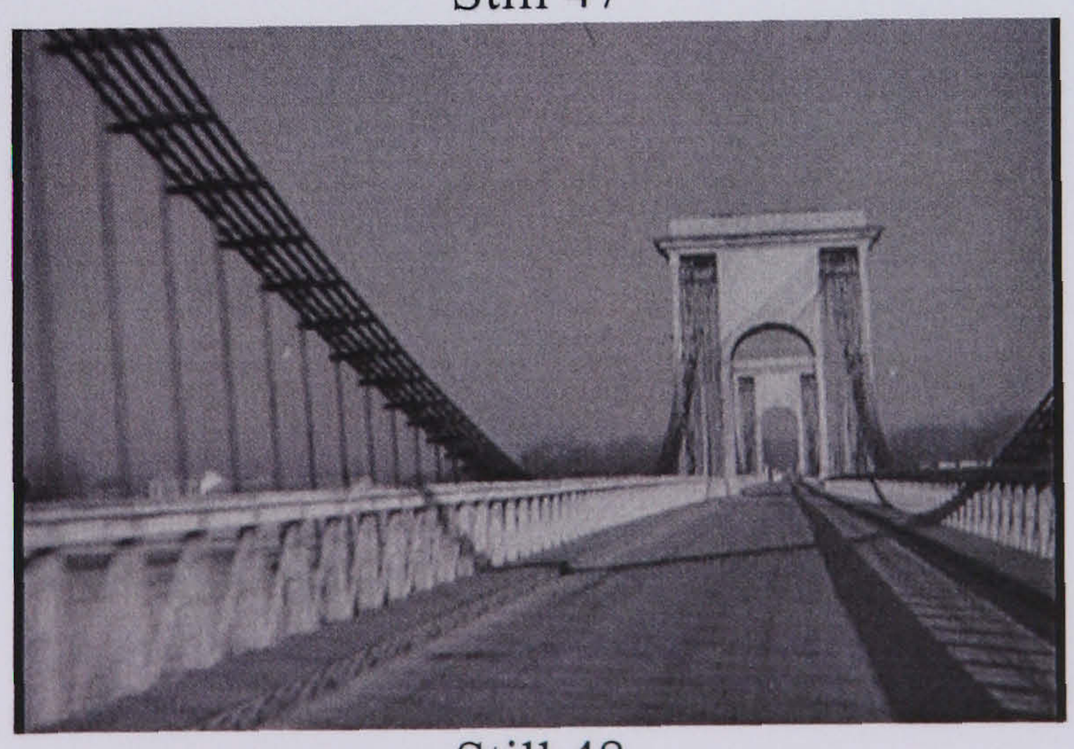

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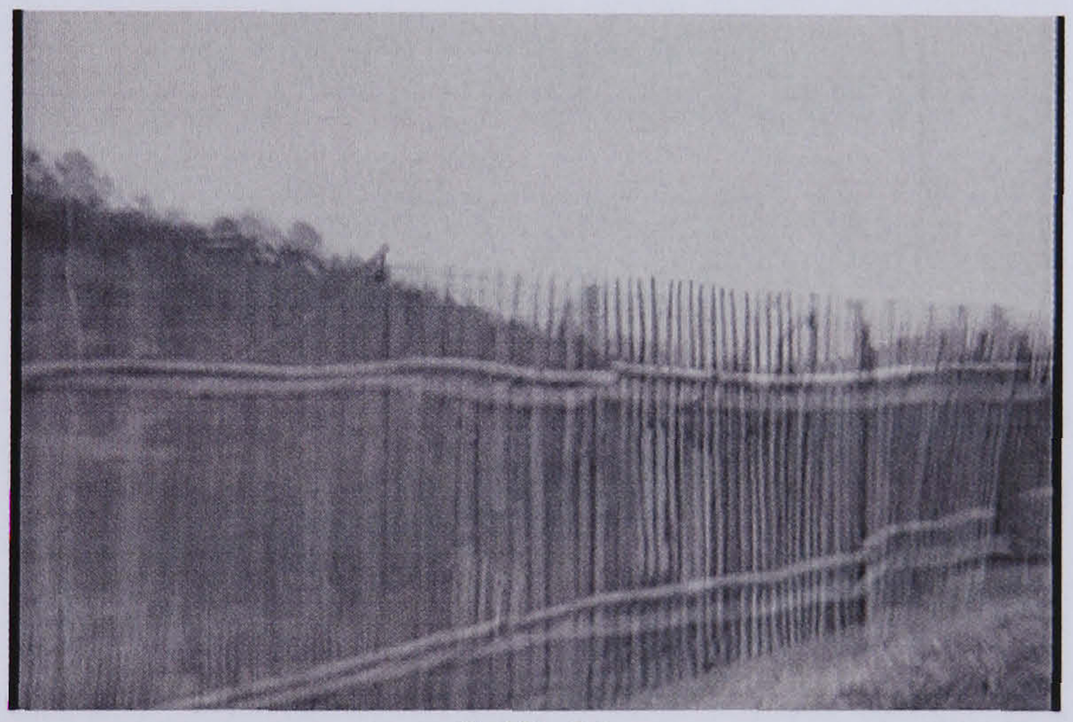

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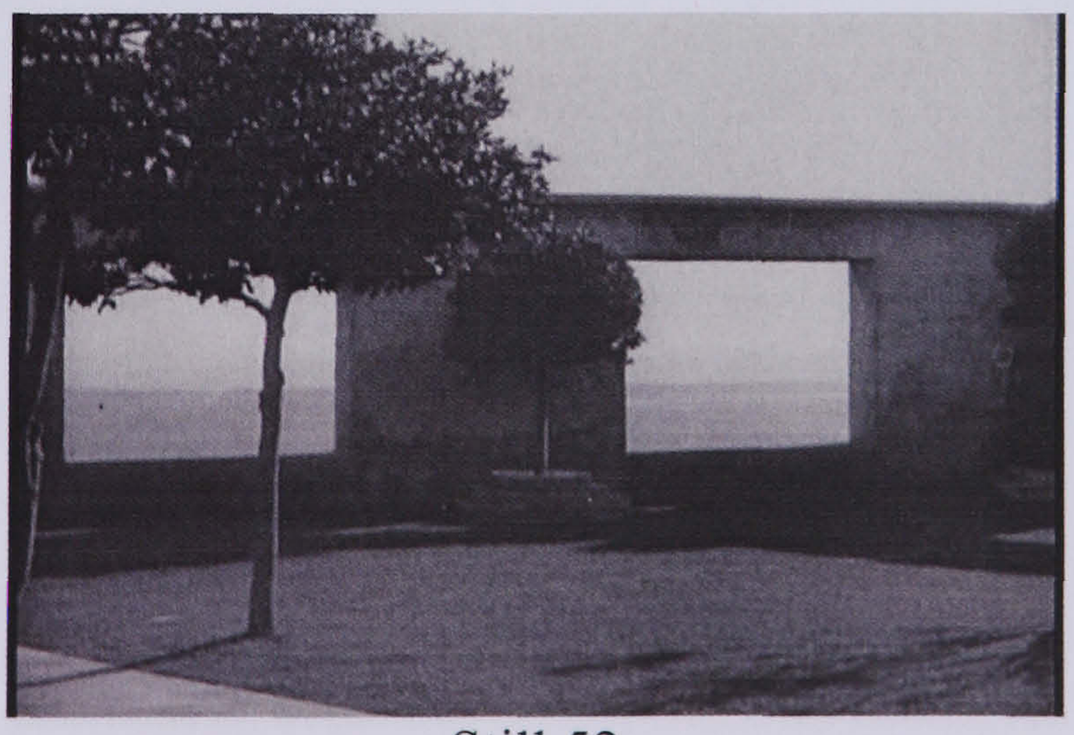

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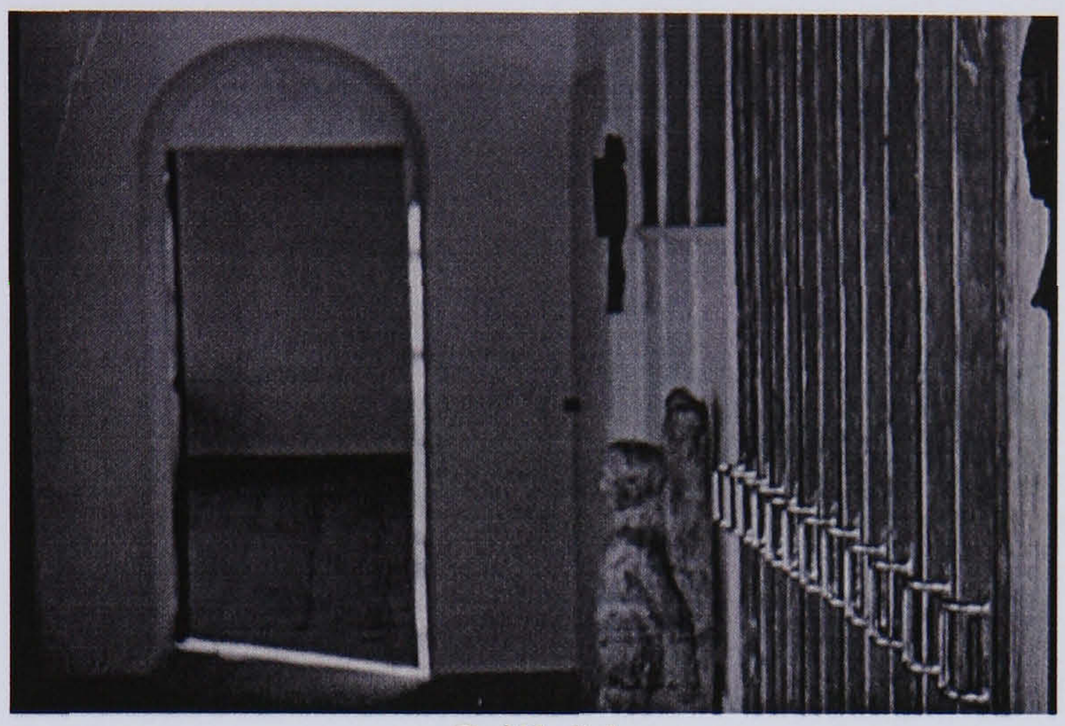

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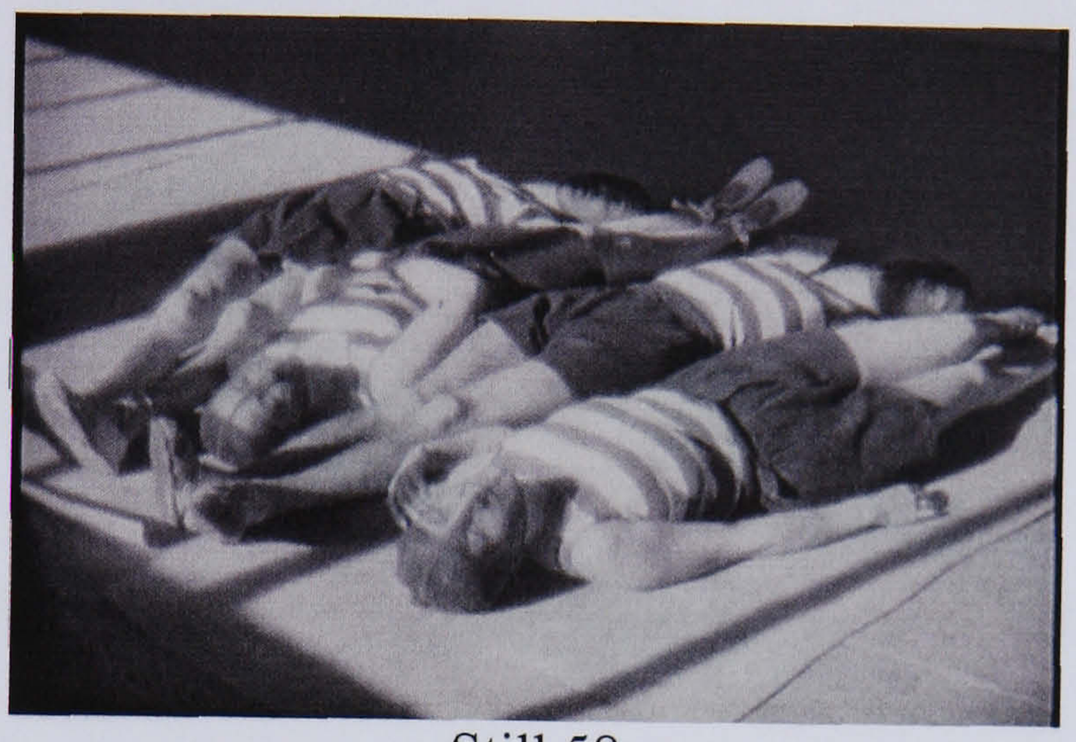

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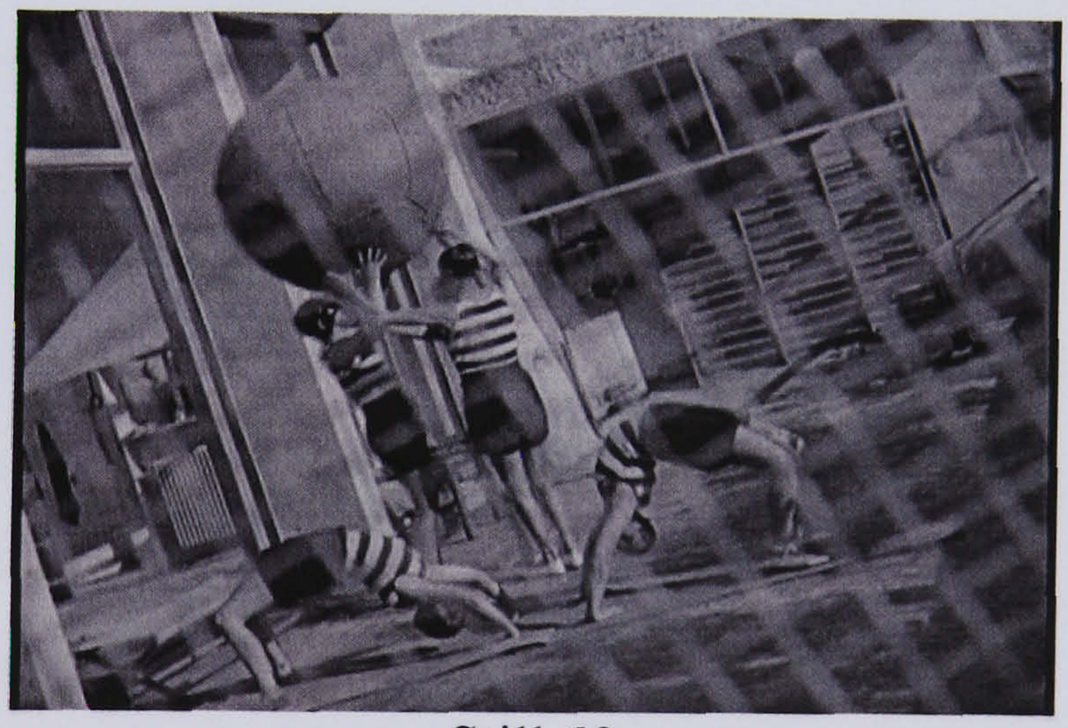

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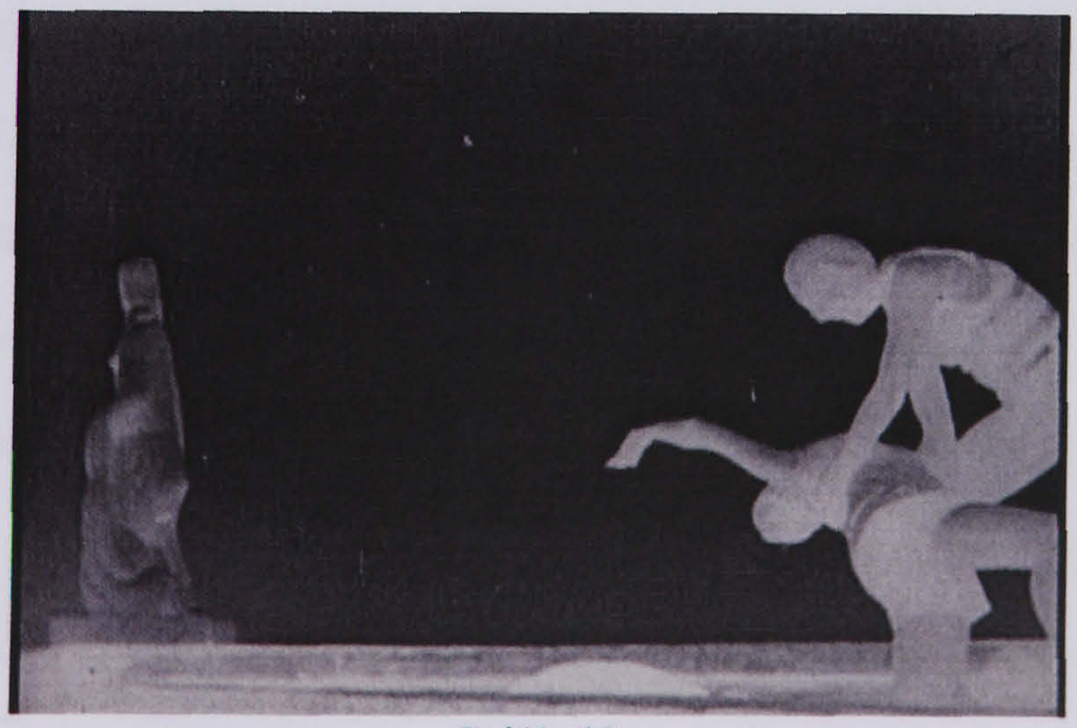

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CONCLUSION

Despite the continued reticence and scepticism he showed towards it, Man Ray was fascinated by the creative possibilities of film. This fascination is expressed in his work before he engaged seriously with the medium and it continued after the completion of his last film in 1929, be it in the form of collaborations, short cinematic essays or personal home movies. Like numerous other artists of the period, he was curious to see how film – the quintessential modernist medium – could be used to express his revolutionary artistic ideas. The four films he made during the 1920s reveal many of the hallmarks of modernism: a rejection of established practices, such as the exploration beyond traditional mimetic approaches to representation, a reassessment of reality, and, most importantly, an interest in medium-specificity. In terms of independent, experimental forms of cinema, they are amongst the most historically significant, since they represent the first sustained example of an alternative mode of filmmaking, both economically and stylistically. *Le Retour à la raison*, for example, is remarkable in the extent of its unconventionality, transgressing the norms of pre-planned construction, exhibition, spectatorship and even, crucially, the mechanical basis of cinema. *Emak Bakia*, a showcase of different visual techniques and effects, pushes these explorations further by playing abstraction against figuration, objectivity against subjectivity, live action against animation and light against shadow, turning the film into a series of binary oppositions. The later films, *L'Etoile de mer* and *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, build on the cinematic use of text, finding new ways to bring poetry into a relationship with images.

But it is as cinematic manifestations of Dada and Surrealism that Man Ray's films have gained most notoriety, not suprisingly, since during the 1920s in France, these two movements dominated artistic expression and discourse. Man Ray played a key role in both but also kept himself at a distance from aesthetic dogmas and the staunch political views of the Surrealists, demonstrating one of the most interesting examples of simultaneous affinity and marginality. The fundamental differences between Dada and Surrealism – the undefined and impulsive nature of the former with its declarations of nothingness and desire for destruction contrasting with the

academic, doctrinal approach of the latter, based on the scientific writings of Freud – often seem to disappear in Man Ray's work. Although he is positioned at the crossroads of Dada and Surrealism, making his art difficult to assess from any one standpoint, Man Ray also tests the creative boundaries of the movements. Rather than fully adhere to the collective aims set out in various declarations and manifestoes, the principles were incorporated into his own personal artistic program, presenting an interpretation of the Dada and Surrealist approach from an entirely new angle. Man Ray's pronounced aestheticism and his preoccupation with the formal implications of artistic expression aligns him with the purist tendencies of early modernism against which Dada and Surrealism were positioned. Both movements opposed the bourgeois introspection of modern art, with its insistence on form and its "art for art's sake" leanings and pursued a more politically engaged, in Peter Burger's words, "integration of art into the praxis of life."[1] What is most interesting about Man Ray is the way in which he allows these forces to co-exist within a single work. This thesis has used Man Ray's ambiguous position within Dada and Surrealism as a starting point for the discussion of his films, which are regularly defined in relation to them. Instead of simply accepting the films under the banner of either movement, each of the previous chapters has assessed the circumstances surrounding its making in an attempt to understand the extent to which historical positioning may influence the way a particular work is received and understood. The main focus has therefore been to represent Dada and Surrealism as overlapping with a range of other visual concerns, including the exploration of the formal possibilities of the film medium.

Through this reassessment of the films, emphasis has been shifted onto two main areas that have, up to now, received relatively little attention: the first, an understanding of the films as expressing fundamental aspects of Man Ray's artistic attitude, allowing them to be viewed alongside his work in other media; the second, a consideration of how the films relate to each other, revealing recurring patterns and concerns that lead us to an awareness of his 'cinematic sensibility'. These two poles of enquiry – contextualising Man Ray's films within his work as an artist and exploring the way in which he develops a specifically cinematic 'voice' – have

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[1] Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 49.

demonstrated a fluid interaction between his artistic and cinematic activity, to which the title of this thesis – "a cinematic artist" – refers. It is the way film is incorporated into Man Ray's artistic investigations, using it as an extension of other visual media, whilst at the same time delving into its innate capacities, that makes the study of this period of involvement with the moving image both interesting and indispensable.

What emerges as the most interesting and innovative aspect of Man Ray's filmmaking is the way his trans-artistic approach – perfectly highlighted in Neil Baldwin's comment quoted in the introductory chapter to this thesis – facilitates an unprecendented dialogue between film and the other arts. This approach is best understood in the context of Man Ray's relationship with photography, an art form he became involved with, it should be mentioned, only in order to produce reproductions of his paintings. Thus, from very early in his career, one medium is defined in relation to another. At the beginning of the thesis I discussed Man Ray's introduction of mechanical processes into the art of painting and the removal of mechanical intervention in the rayograph process of photography, reversing the traditional relationship between the artist and the material. Man Ray's pioneering of the rayograph and aerograph techniques is perhaps one of the best examples of his artistic cross-fertilisation. It can be seen also in the use of photography to provide documents of his objects and sculptures, posing the crucial question of exactly which medium we are dealing with when faced with such works – is it the object or the photograph of the object that constitutes the 'work' itself? Man Ray was aware of this issue in the intervention of photography, as he once stated that he liked the reproductions of certain of his works so much that he would often destroy the original and keep the photographic document.

When Man Ray stated that his original interest in the cinema was to put his photographic compositions into motion, he was suggesting not simply a two-way interrelationship between photography and the cinema, but also, in the case of *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, a three-way fusion of photography, film and sculpture/collage. In these two films, the moving rayographs and light compositions are accompanied by a number of kineticised objects and drawings, some of which were created for the film and later became works in their own right, such as *Homme d'affaires*, *Fisherman's Idol* or *Emak Bakia*, or already existed before the making of

the film, such as *Dancer/Danger*. In other cases, such as the paper spiral or the moving poem in *Le Retour à la raison*, an object in the film mimicks a previous construction or a continued theme in Man Ray's work. In all of these areas the principle concern lies in the merging of the qualities inherent to the film medium with those characteristic of another area, notably sculpture. This fusion is particularly well highlighted in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, where Jacques Lipchitz's sculpture that stands outside the Villa de Noailles is brought to life through a series of shots suggesting movement. As I have stated in the previous chapter, the title of the sculpture – *J'aime le mouvement qui déplace les formes* – is particularly relevant since it highlights the very idea of perception and movement that Man Ray tries to express in his cinematic representation of it.. The implication is clear and directs our attention to one of the main themes of Man Ray's films – the exploration of one medium through another.

This artistic overlapping can be found on many levels, from Man Ray's "painting with light" in *Emak Bakia* to his bringing together of painting and architecture through the medium of poetry in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*. The theme of dance suggested by the choreographed movements of the characters and objects in that film can be threaded back to what Man Ray described as the "epileptic dance" of drawing pins in *Le Retour à la raison*, the "dance" of the shirt collars in *Emak Bakia*, not to mention the very literal reference to dance in the Charleston sequence. It is therefore possible to suggest that Man Ray creates an analogy between the art of dance and the kinds of movement the cinema is capable of creating, especially since, as I have tried to demonstrate in the previous chapters, his films are based largely on the principle of repetition interspersed with variation. As with the film on which he collaborated, *Ballet Mécanique*, it is the ability of cinema to bring inanimate phenomena to life that seems to create the crucial link with dance.

An analysis of the four films reveals a striking number of similarities on both a formal and thematic level, presenting the most important challenge to many previous studies in which they are separated along the lines of Dada and Surrealism. One finds a repetition of formal compositions, light patterns and iconography that sees Man Ray trying out the same ideas in different ways and in altered circumstances. Light is a key feature of *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia*, but

with *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* Man Ray takes this interest further, moving from studio-based effects to natural light. Yet the visual outcome is consistent, with reflection and shadow remaining central components, despite being brought into a dialogue with other concerns such as the exploration of cinematic space. Movement plays a key role in all the films as does the binary image, both elements that characterise Man Ray's artistic approach. Often the films make direct references to each other, either through linguistic details or in the re-appearance of particular motifs.

Man Ray's cinema represents, above all, an exploration into vision, linking his approach with a dominant strand of avant-garde film theory of the 1920s, represented in writings of Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein and Paul Ramain, to which I have drawn particular attention in chapter two. However, his method is unique in the sense that his starting point is the alteration of the way the world is perceived and understood. The primary way in which Man Ray achieves this is by creating an interaction between abstraction or figuration or by transforming the figural into the formless. The cinema was the perfect medium for this as it allowed Man Ray to make these transformations through time so that the image could be made to oscillate between one mode of representation and another, such as the car headlights in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, the rotating objects in *Le Retour à la raison* and the sequences of light reflections and distortions in *Emak Bakia* where the identity of the object constantly remains just out of reach. The repeated use of superimposition suggests one of the ways in which Man Ray used the cinema to extend his explorations into vision, since the technique is rarely used in his photography (See **Fig. 22** for one of the few exceptions). Again, his interest clearly lay in the way superimpositions could be made through time, gradually transforming and developing visual perception, as is the case with the egg crate in *Le Retour à la raison* (**Still 11**), the multiple feet dismounting a car and the swimming fish in *Emak Bakia* (**Stills 18 & 23**), and the opening shots of the villa in *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* (**Still 47**).

The emphasis on vision is therefore intricately tied to an investigation into the mechanics and materiality of the cinema. Throughout his films Man Ray draws attention to the process of fimmaking and its ability to transform vision, giving rise

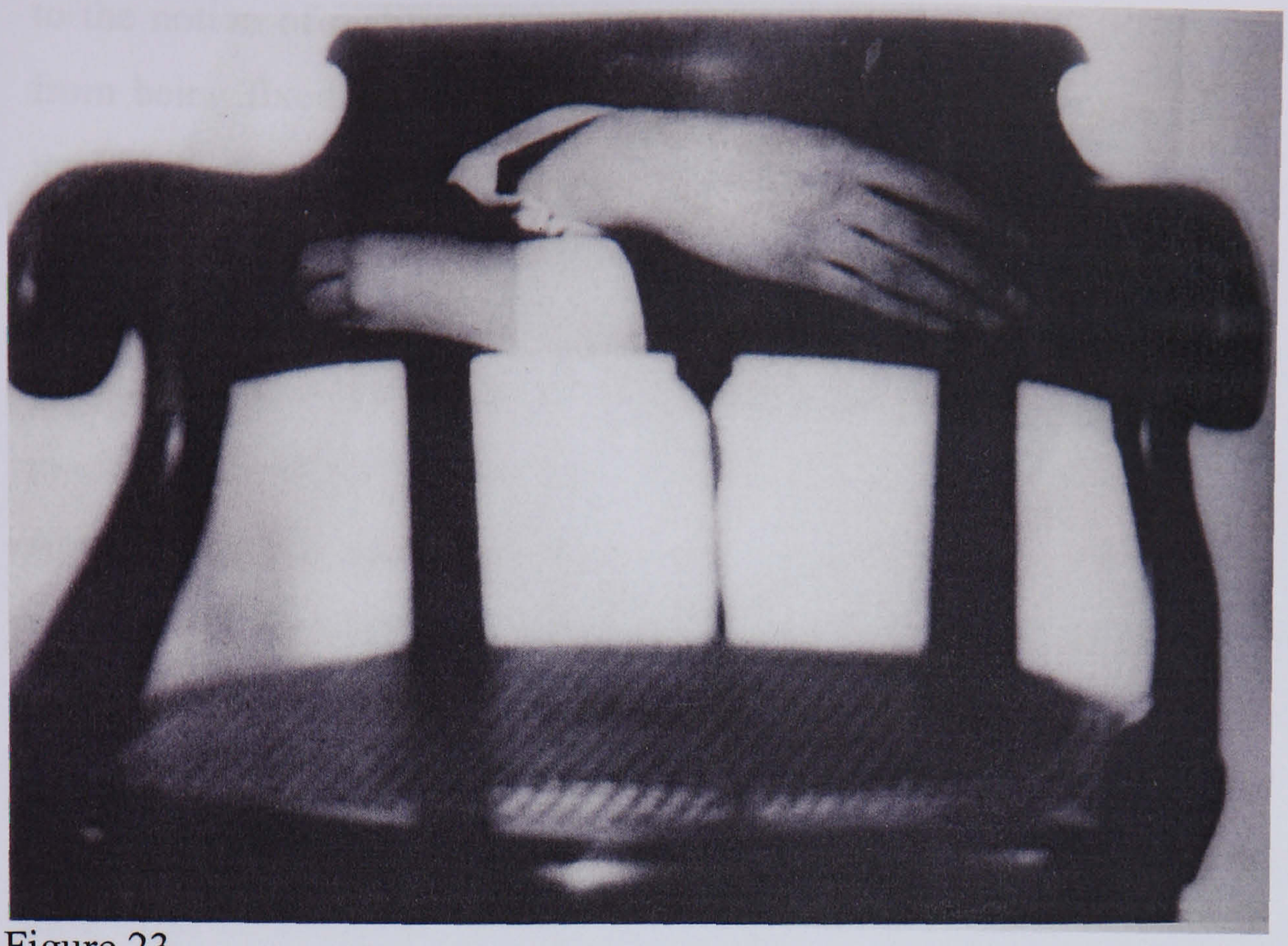

Figure 23.

Figure 24.

to the notion of reality as a construct. This 'reality', as it is seen in these films, far from being fixed and determined, is rather in a constant state of flux, transforming itself with every new camera angle, movement, change of focus, framing, light effect or other technical manipulation. The inherent qualities of the cinema open up a field of possibilities for Man Ray's fascination with reality and its representation. The spectator is asked, literally, to open their eyes, hence the predominance of the eye motif in *Emak Bakia*, the film that is most concerned with cinematic vision. Abandoning the limitations of everyday vision, we give ourselves over to the offerings of the camera eye. Man Ray's approach does not equate, however, to a straightforward veneration of the cinema and technical possibilities. In his discussions about art, he commented on a number of occasions that the artist must feel a "certain contempt" for the material that he chooses for the expression of an idea.[2] His first film, *Le Retour à la raison*, seems to express such a position and challenges the conventional forms of vision offered by the cinema by introducing an approach to reality that radically departs from previously accepted notions of representation. As with photography, the rejection of the camera – the mechanical basis of the medium – mirrors the way in which artists of the early twentieth-century moved away from the reliance on the traditional materials of visual representation such as paint and paintbrushes in order to expand the parameters of creative expression. It is from this perspective that Man Ray's approach can be understood in terms of injecting a Dada sensibility into a more purist conception of the cinema, a relationship that the thesis has continually drawn attention to.

Man Ray's critical view of the cinema was based largely on its dependence on narrative, a position that can be related to similar criticisms of film's subservience to literary modes of storytelling by the some of the Impressionist filmmakers, notably Dulac. Nonetheless, another fundamental difference between him and these early filmmakers can be found within his general disinterest in theory. As I have already pointed out, Man Ray was a pragmatist and reacted to things as they affected him directly. He did not seek consistency in his approach to art and life but rather

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[2] "Un certain mépris pour le moyen physique d'exprimer une idée est indispensable pour la réaliser au mieux." Man Ray, "L'Age de la lumière." *Minotaure* nos. 3-4, 1933, p. 1. Elsewhere he states: "Si l'on est en pleine possession d'un medium, force nous est de le mépriser un peu." Man Ray in an interview with Paul Hill and Tom Cooper, *Camera*, number 2, 1975, p. 23.

concentrated his interest on the expression of immediate thoughts and feelings. Therefore, he has stated that what he most abhors in narrative film is the repetition, the banality and, above all, the length. He refers to being bored, to constructing distorting glasses that transform the image into something magical and stimulating. Yet he denied that his relationship to the cinema resembled anything like a purist approach and did not, unlike the first wave of avant-garde filmmakers, pursue the medium as an independent art form. Although his films explore certain medium-specific qualities such as vision and movement, he once spoke of his ideal form of cinematic expression as involving elements not strictly associated with the cinema, but with an impression of reality:

> Dans les années 20, j'ai fait des films en noir et blanc, non pas parce que j'étais puriste, mais parce que la couleur n'existait pas. Je ne suis pas un puriste. Si je faisais un film maintenant je ferais un film en couleurs et en trois dimensions, qui remplacerait le théâtre lui-même. En trois dimensions! Il faudrait que le film donne les odeurs, en même temps que le son, et puis le chaud et le froid, évidemment.[3]

So, whilst we can compare certain aspects of his cinematic sensibility to contemporaneous avant-garde film theory, it ultimately remains idiosyncratic in its ambiguity. Although his statement seems intentionally controversial, it nonetheless highlights Man Ray's ultimate fascination that weaves his films together and places them firmly within his oeuvre: the impression of 'reality' and the different approaches to representation.

The year 1929 can be seen as the final stage of Man Ray's filmmaking but it by no means represents the end of his involvement with the moving image. In 1935 he collaborated on the making of a Surrealist film written by André Breton and Paul Eluard. The project, *Essai de simulation du délire cinématographique*, was abandoned after a number of technical mishaps and only a few stills remain, which were published with sections of the scenario in the magazine, *View*. Surrealism was also the theme of Man Ray's next and last cinematic contribution – a section of Hans Richter's film, *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1948), entitled "Ruth, Roses and Revolvers." Richter's interpretation of Man Ray's scenario/story represents a

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[3] Man Ray in Pierre Bourgeade, *Bonsoir Man Ray* (Paris: Maeght éditeur, 2002), p. 50.

reversal of the process demonstrated in the making of *L'Etoile de mer*. This reversal signals the extent to which Man Ray had distanced himself from the medium of film. In his autobiography, he explains his reluctance to continue his explorations into the moving image:

> A book, a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a photograph, and any other concrete object are always at one's disposition, to be appreciated or ignored, whereas a spectacle before an assemblage insists on the general attention, limited to the period of its presentation. Whatever appreciating and stimulation may result in the latter case is influenced by the mood of the moment and of the gathering. I prefer the permanent immobility of a static work which allows me to make my deductions at my leisure, without being distracted by attending circumstances.[4]

If the temporal quality of film provided the initial stimulus for Man Ray's explorations into the medium, allowing him to set his photographic compositions in motion, it was also precisely this characteristic that prevented him from further incorporating it into his artistic repertoire.

Nevertheless, the impact of his work in film can be detected in a number of areas. If his experience in other media of artistic expression influenced his approach to the cinema, it is also true that traces of his cinematic compositions can be found in subsequent works. This is the case not simply in the re-presentation as photographic images of some of the objects featured in the films, but also in the use of similar techniques and subtle references to shared concerns. The light-striped torso in *Le Retour à la raison* re-appears in 1931 as a series of photographs using the same effects, this time with Lee Miller, and not Kiki, as the subject (**Fig. 23**). As chapter two highlights, electric light also becomes a recurring theme in Man Ray's later photographs. In 1959, he gave the title 'Piscinéma' to one of his abstract paintings, creating a clear link with the abstract effects made by the reflected light during the swimming pool sequence of *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*. The 1965 image, *Etoile de verre*, a semi-abstract depiction of moonlight reflected on water is both a verbal and visual reference to *L'Etoile de mer*.

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[4] Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1998), p. 232.

The influence of Man Ray's cinematic innovations on subsequent developments in avant-garde cinema can be detected particularly within the realms of the frameless or camera-less technique. This new development in the cinema, which emerged directly from Man Ray's photographic activity and thus testifies to a strong link between the two media, undoubtedly played a role in the move away from traditional methods of filmmaking in later experimental cinema. As Nicky Hamlyn suggests, this process of working directly with the physical materiality of the filmstrip can be seen as the precursor of the camera-less film as pursued by artists such as Len Lye, Stan Brakhage, Lis Rhodes, Tony Conrad and Peter Kubelka.[5] I have already drawn parallels between the performative element of Man Ray's filmmaking and later developments in the New York-based Neo-dada movement, Fluxus. A further link can be made between certain optical effects created by Man Ray and the flicker films of artists such as Paul Sharits, another member of Fluxus. Whilst these parallels may be used to support the Dada aspect of Man Ray's filmmaking, they also suggest the continued importance of materiality and vision to the development of the avant-garde film more generally, precisely those concerns that Man Ray pursued with vigour throughout his cinematic career.

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[5] Nicky Hamlyn. "Frameless Film." In: *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists' Film and Video*, eds. Nina Danino and Michael Mazière (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 163.

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L'Age d'Or (Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, 1930)

Anémic Cinéma (Marcel Duchamp, 1926)

Ballet Mécanique (Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, Man Ray, 1924)

Biceps et Bijoux (Jacques Manuel, 1928)

The Blue Angel (Josef von Sternberg, 1931)

Carmen, la de Triana (Florián Rey, 1938)

Un Chien andalou (Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, 1929)

Cinq minutes de cinéma pur (Henri Chomette, 1926)

La Coquille et le Clergyman (Germaine Dulac, 1927)

Destruction d'un mur (Auguste Lumière, 1895)

Dreams That Money Can Buy (Hans Richter, 1948)

Emak Bakia (Man Ray, 1926)

Entr'Acte (René Clair, 1924)

L'Etoile de mer (Man Ray, 1928)

Filmstudie (Hans Richter, 1926)

Ghosts Before Breakfast (*Vormittagspuk*, Hans Richter, 1929)

L'Inhumaine (Marcel L'Herbier, 1923)

Jeux des reflets et de la vitesse (Henri Chomette, 1924)

King Kong (Merian C. Cooper; Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933)

Lichtspiel (László Moholy-Nagy, 1930)

The Man With a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Les Mystères du Château du Dé (Man Ray, 1929)

Le Retour à la raison (Man Ray, 1923)

Rhythmus 21 (Hans Richter, 1921)

Rhythmus 23 (Hans Richter, 1923)

Le Sang d'un Poète (Jean Cocteau, 1930)

Zen For Film (Nam June Paik, 1964/65)

Zouzou (Marc Allégret, 1934)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1: *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself With Her Shadows*, 1916, oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

2: *Moving Sculpture*, 1920. Jeddermann Collection, N. A.

3: *Lampshade*, 1919, (1921 replica) painted white tin, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Collection of the Société Anonyme. The original object was a paper lampshade hung from a metal stand. Man Ray created numerous replicas after the original was destroyed.

4: *Obstruction*, 1920, coat hangers. original lost, photograph by Man Ray. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

5: Letter from Man Ray to Tristan Tzara, ca. June 1921. Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

6: *Noire et blanche*, 1926, Collection Lucien Treillard, Paris.

7: *Noire et blanche*, 1926, Collection Lucien Treillard, Paris.

8: *Cadeau*, 1921, mixed media: iron and tacks. Original lost, photograph by Man Ray. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

9. *Indestructible Object*, 1922-3, mixed media: metronome with photograph (original object destroyed, 1965 editioned replica held at Tate Modern, London). Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

10: *Bd Edgar-Quinet à minuit*, 1924. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

11: *Self Portrait*, 1916, oil on canvas, bells and push button. Original destroyed, photograph by Man Ray. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

12: *Woman* (*Shadows*), 1918. Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection, Milan.

13: *Man*, 1918, silver print. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

14-19: Scenario for *L'Etoile de mer*. Held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

20: *The Riddle*, or *The Enigma of Isadore Ducasse*, 1920. Original object dismantled. Photograph by Man Ray. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

21: Untitled, 1930. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

22: Extract from Stéphane Mallarmé's poem, *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897). Œuvres complètes, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 382-3.

23: Untitled, 1924. Collection Aleta Wallach, Beverly Hills, California.

24: Untitled, 1930. Man Ray Trust/ADAGP.

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